How to Write A Good Play

Frank Archer

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BY

FRANK ARCHER

"That's a question: how shall we try it?"

The Comedy of Errors, Act V., Scene 1.

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PREFACE.

FOR those who have had the good fortune to succeed in mastering the difficulties of which this volume treats, it may have but a limited interest; but the author believes that his views, as an actor of many years' experience, will not prove unacceptable to that large body of writers for whom the problem has a special attraction.

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HOW TO WRITE A GOOD PLAY.

CHAPTER I.

PLAY-WRITING AND THOSE WHO HAVE TRIED IT.

To write a play and have it accepted by a London manager! What an achievement for a young and unknown aspirant! To write a play which shall not only pass the shoals and reefs of acceptance, but that shall sail safely into the pleasant waters of public approval and commendation, and be greeted by the applause of the multitude, which shall in short carry its author to that haven which so many are ever struggling to make, Success. To find your work the delight of stalls, boxes, pit and gallery. What a compensation for all the labours, anxieties and disappointments of the past! To be talked of at dinner-parties, dances, clubs and social gatherings of every sort with pleasant interest. To hear Brown as he passes you in the street whisper to Jones, "That's Robinson, the author of the new play 'So-and-So.'" To discover that the manager whom you met but a few months since, and whose arrangements were complete for several years, marvellously affable, and most desirous for a little chat with you. To learn that he

is really anxious "to have another look" at that trifle you submitted to him so long ago, and which his "acting-manager" declined on his behalf, with that courtesy so characteristic of him ; and which in a fit of desperation you put on the back of the fire, having become quite conscious since that nowhere else could it have been ensured so warm a reception. To become suddenly aware that your correspondents have multiplied largely. That actors have been struck with ideas for plays by you in which they are sure they will "do big things." That the most charming actresses, without any provocation, address you "My dear Mr. Robinson." That old friends and acquaintances turn up unexpectedly, many of them, be it said, honestly proud of your success. That you are beset by autograph hunters, and harassed by photographers, whose collections of eminent men would be wofully incomplete without your co-operation. That you are the happy recipient of every sort of circular and advertisement, including patent pens, curious inks, bottles of wine, samples of perfumery and specimens of something you regard as having a certain appropriate suggestiveness—soap. To be taught perhaps that popularity has its penalties as well as its prizes, and if you have prudence, to learn that this adulation is not unattended with danger. It is assumed that you are not one of those blest individuals to whom the failure or success of your play is a matter of supreme indifference. But this is scarcely possible, for had you been a stoic, you would not have written a play ; and indifference is not consistent with what you have so patiently and heroically gone through. The fact of your having a piece produced successfully in-

dicates a comprehensive sympathy and a possession of the social instinct in no slight degree. We will take it for granted that you have not had any previous association with the stage, and have been able to put together a piece that by some novelty of subject or treatment has secured a unanimously favourable verdict. As a young fellow with a sound mental tone, and the love of a good drama, you have merely had such chances of familiarity with acting plays as a visit to some of our best theatres affords. Your play is by no means perfect—perfection in stage work, as you are to discover later, is decidedly rare—but after undergoing an amount of labour that you never dreamt of, and fighting a host of difficulties of which you never had the faintest conception, your play is produced, and you find yourself hailed by some of the critics and the public as "The New Dramatist." The former say your work is not that of a Sheridan—rather a favourite negative, but some of these gentlemen have a keen sense of humour, but you are told that your plot is good, your interest well sustained, your characterization truthful, your situations strong, and your dialogue, even if it does not rise to classical pitch, full of brilliance and point. When one of your nearest friends talks to you of your success and asks how you managed it, you are a little at a loss for an answer. One thing is very certain, that the MS. of your play as it was first submitted to the manager, and the play that is being acted every evening are two very distinct things. You wrote for success and hoped for it, but its extent has come upon you, you confide to your friend, as a very delightful surprise. Though conscious that your work was well and faithfully done, you

cannot but allow that your play has not only been vastly improved by valuable suggestions from the manager and the actors, but that some of the best things in it are directly and absolutely due to them. You are thus apt at times to fancy that you may not be the great creature you are made to appear. About one thing, however, there is no fancy. The manager has behaved with fairness and liberality, and consequently you are in receipt each week of a handsome *honorarium* which does much to allay any restless and unquiet symptoms; nay more, he has commissioned you to do another play for him, to be produced as soon as that somewhat capricious and jaded entity "the town" is tired of your drama. I have spoken of danger. It is not at all certain that your position would not have been safer if the verdict on your work had been less unanimous, had it been but a *succés d'estime*—if the knowing ones had shaken their heads pleasantly and said, "Yes, very good! very clever! but no money in it!" Bad for your pocket possibly, but it might have enabled you to appraise your abilities with more justness; those elements of popularity, even if due to yourself, which is somewhat doubtful, being of a somewhat variable and evasive kind. Had your play been a complete failure there would have been no dishonour in it, supposing that you did nothing to degrade such gifts as you are endowed with; and though according to that clever dramatist, with whose works you are familiar,—

> "In the lexicon of youth, which Fate reserves
> For a bright manhood, there is no such word
> As—Fail!"

no one knew better than the author of the lines, that not only are failures possible, but that they are the stepping stones to success.

The sketch that I have just made is quite within the bounds of possibility. It is assumed that the success was of a transient kind, but some of the best and more enduring work for the stage has been accomplished by comparatively young men.

Indeed, it is rare to find the names of any writers of ability who have made the first effort in mature years. With those who have done so, the inducement has generally arisen from a success or popularity gained in other departments of literature. In some cases they have attempted, not unnaturally, to conjure with their names, knowing that it would be the means of commanding attention ; and to their names they are often indebted for the opportunity of appealing to an audience at all.

It is common with many writers, whose talents are above the average, to try and express themselves in the dramatic form. In some instances they ignore the fact that dramatic form or expression by means of dialogue, is one of the smallest difficulties. The building a play they do not regard as an art—a something to be attained, or they seem wilfully blind to its necessities and requirements. It is enough apparently that the *dramatis personæ* are presented in such language as seems appropriate to them, with little respect for considerations of human interest involving plot and the development of character. Again and again the present writer has been asked for his opinion on what authors conceived to be plays, when in reality they were not plays

at all. It is an experience common also to every manager of a theatre. It is not a case where the figure has been poorly or inartistically draped. It is, that there has been no figure to drape—not even a skeleton. The drapery, sometimes rich in tone and fine in quality, has been supported with a framework so feeble and ill-constructed, that collapse was inevitable.

The object of this volume is to try and show the army of aspirants for theatrical honours what the nature of the path is that they will probably have to traverse, what can be regarded as a successful drama, and the qualities required to produce one. To take a hurried glance at certain great authors who have tried to accomplish the feat, to examine the mechanism of a play, the types of characters and dialogue that are effective on the stage, and to offer such general advice as may be of service: the counsel that the author tenders being the result of actual stage experience.

He does not pretend to deal with the higher branches of the subject to any extent. Tragedy and the poetic drama require a separate examination. Beyond the mention of the work of a few eminent writers he will confine his observations to the more modern manifestations of the stage. This effort is not likely to augment that large army of ambitious incompetents whose active existence is beyond dispute. His book is written in the hope of its being read, and he believes that the tyro who is in earnest will find something of sterling value in the remarks set down. His labours may serve also to lighten the managers' load by checking the tendency of authors to overwhelm them with efforts in dramatic form, which have consumed time and thought that might

have been more profitably employed in some other departments of mental labour.

That play-writing has, and always will have, a fascination for intellectual people—apart from its more solid emoluments, there can be little doubt; though, as we shall see, success in the theatre is by no means proportionate to the great gifts and qualities often employed to secure it. "Of all literary fascinations," says Miss Mitford, "there is none like that of the drama written or acted, none that begins so early, or that lasts so long."

In the array of great names of authors associated with *belles lettres* from the time of Cowley to our own, there are very few that have not attempted the difficult art of play-writing. From this always delightful field we may note flowers that have utterly failed in an alien soil to yield their richest tints or their sweetest aroma.

> "Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
> Not light them for themselves:"

And it would be strange indeed if those to whom the heritage of Shakespeare's wealth had fallen had received no incitement from his "so potent art."

Starting from the period mentioned—about the beginning of the seventeenth century—and without including living writers, I here submit an imposing list of names whose owners, with perhaps the single exception of Sir Henry Taylor, the author of "Philip van Artevelde," do not base their claims to eminence on having been the writers of plays, but who have nevertheless attempted it. Nor is the list by any means an exhaustive one.

Something like two-thirds of the number actually had

plays produced. Others, be it said, wrote without any view to their productions courting the glare of the footlights, their plays being brought forward sometimes, if not in direct opposition to their wishes, with what may be considered a tacit consent. Here is the category :—Cowley, Thomson, Johnson, Horace Walpole, Smollett, Hannah More, Frances Burney, Godwin, Joanna Baillie, Wordsworth, Scott, Coleridge, Lamb, Landor, Moore, Leigh Hunt, Byron, Miss Mitford, Procter, Shelley, Lord John Russell, Mrs. Hemans, Hood, Sir Henry Taylor, Horne, Richard Cobden, Disraeli, Thackeray, Dickens, and Browning.

The great names of Dryden, Defoe, Swift, Steele, Addison, Pope, Fielding, and Burns will be missed. Dryden was a prolific dramatist, whose popularity in his day was unmistakable.

There is no evidence, I think, to show that either Defoe or Swift attempted play-writing. There is a curious thing in connection with that mighty intellectual enigma, the Dean of St. Patrick's. Nowhere in his works does he mention Shakespeare, and it has been asserted that he never even possessed a copy of his plays. Steele, Addison, and Fielding, although I shall have occasion to revert to them, I have not included, as they obtained a more marked popularity in their day than that awarded to others of a like eminence. Pope's association as part author with Gay in the farce "Three Hours after Marriage" was eventually disproved. Fielding, like Dryden, does not claim to be considered, but there are good reasons I think for giving some attention to his work.

Though Burns did not write a play, he intended to

do so. Ramsay of Ochtertyre relates how the poet "told me he had now gotten a subject for a drama which he was to call 'Rob McQuechan's Elshin,' from a popular story of Robert Bruce being defeated on the Water of Cairn, etc." It may be remembered also how anxious Burns was on one occasion to secure the works of all the popular dramatists, "but comic authors chiefly."

There is one other popular name that might almost be given a place in my list—the industrious Southey. The historic drama, "The Fall of Robespierre," of which Coleridge wrote the first act, was completed by the author of "Thalaba."

There are half a dozen other names in *belles-lettres* which do not belong to play-writers (Sterne, Cowper, De Quincey, Carlyle, Keats, and Macaulay), and I think they nearly make up the remainder of those that are best known. Students of the English stage have a thorough acquaintance with its successful writers, as also with many others who were popular in their day, but whose plays would no longer prove attractive. As, however, we are concerned more particularly with those who have failed to meet the taste of the general public, it will be unnecessary at this point to speak of well-known and approved dramatists. One or two exceptions to this may be allowed. Before considering what constitutes a successful acting play, a bird's-eye view of the dramatic work of the thirty authors selected may prove of interest, even if it does not satisfactorily supply the clue to their not having attained any lasting success in the theatre.

The list at first may appear rather startling.

"What!" I hear it exclaimed, "Did not Byron write 'Manfred' and 'Sardanapalus' and 'Werner'? Did not Browning write 'Strafford' and 'A Blot in the Scutcheon' and 'Colombe's Birthday,' and have not they been acted? What of a certain Titanic production called 'The Cenci'? Did Shelley fail in that attempt?" The reply must be, that in spite of the noble work put forth in dramatic form by many of the writers in the above list, not one has produced an acting drama containing the elements of real and sustained popularity. But it will be necessary here to have some regard for side issues, which are of importance in connection with all matters appertaining to plays intended for the boards of a theatre. The issue for the moment is this: It is quite possible that the gifts of some particular actor or actress under certain conditions, as by the accident of an exceptionally strong cast, or by the power of scenic attraction, or at a certain time, owing to some political crisis, or craze of fashion, may obtain the general verdict of success for a play. That is to say, a drama may not only satisfy the critical and artistic faculty, but also put money into the treasury of the theatre. It may therefore be inferred that every necessary condition is fulfilled, but I think it will be found that this is not so.

The first name on my list is that of COWLEY who, as a poet, was ranked by Milton with Spenser and Shakespeare, a verdict that posterity has not endorsed. His dramatic writing consists of "Love's Riddle," a pastoral composed when he was a Westminster boy; the Latin Play "Naufragium Joculare" (the Comic Shipwreck), written and acted at Cambridge when he was but twenty, and "Cutter of Coleman Street," a prose

comedy. With the latter alone we are concerned. That faithful playgoer, Mr. Pepys, may amuse if he does not enlighten us. Under the date of December 16th, 1661, he writes,—

"After dinner to the opera [i.e. the Duke's Theatre], where there was a new play ('Cutter of Coleman Street,') made in the year 1658, with reflections much upon the late times; and it being the first time, the pay was doubled, and so to save money, my wife and I went into the gallery, and there sat and saw very well; and a very good play it is. It seems of Cowley's making."

Seven years later he saw it again. It was revived after Cowley's death,—

"*August 5th*, 1668.—To the Duke of York's playhouse, and there saw 'The Guardian;' formerly the same, I find, that was called 'Cutter of Coleman Street:' a silly play."

The self-satisfied chronicler had seen, done, and thought much in the interval evidently. Though the play was said to have been "composed as a satire upon the Presbyterians, it was resented by the Court party as a satire upon itself." The author's preface to the play proves it was not successful.

Steele and Addison would come next in point of date. The former made both money and reputation by his plays. Though avowedly comedies, they have been appropriately called "Homilies in Dialogue." Steele deserves credit for one thing: he seems to have been the first important writer for the stage who recognized, in times of exceptional coarseness, the delicacy and purity of womanly character.

Addison's "Cato" and its success are well known.

It ran for thirty-five nights uninterruptedly, and was translated into French, Italian, Latin and German. His opera of "Rosomund" is not so well remembered. "The Drummer, or the Haunted House," a comedy, was published anonymously, but after Addison's death was reprinted by Steele and the authorship declared. The latter is said to have been helped by the author of "Cato" with "The Tender Husband." Addison projected a tragedy on the Death of Socrates, which, however, he did not live to execute.

THOMSON, by the popularity obtained by his "Seasons," was enabled to become a candidate for dramatic honours: and in 1727 his tragedy of "Sophonisba" was acted with Wilks and Mrs. Oldfield in the leading parts. The line

"O, Sophonisba, Sophonisba, O!"

and the story of the wag in the pit who called out,—

"O, Jemmy Thomson, Jemmy Thomson, O!"

will be remembered. The line was also parodied by Fielding in "Tom Thumb." Eleven years later was produced "Agamemnon," with Quin as the hero. The actor's goodness of heart in releasing Thomson from the spunging-house deserves noting. Next came the forbidden play "Edward and Eleanora," which however was acted in 1796 by Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble, but only for one night. Its dulness was too great for them to conquer.

Campbell says the only relief to the play was the introduction of the babes—"the little darlings affected the House, but it was with laughter." Thomson wrote

in conjunction with Mallet the masque of "Alfred" which contains "Rule Britannia." "Tancred and Sigismunda," which had for its exponents Garrick and Mrs. Cibber, met with a fate no better than "Edward and Eleanora," though it is said a version of it was produced in Paris with success. After Thomson's death his tragedy of "Coriolanus" was put on the stage by Sir George Lyttelton for the benefit of the poet's family.

He whom Byron called "the prose Homer of human nature," and Scott "the Father of the English novel," would follow Thomson. Fielding was both dramatist and manager. His first play, "Love in Several Masques;" was produced in 1728, when he was but twenty-one years of age. Much of his work for the theatre consisted of satires and shafts aimed at the follies of the hour—but Campbell's estimate of Fielding, namely that he tried the drama without success, is unfair. His adaptations from Molière of the "Médecin malgré lui" (under the title of "The Mock Doctor; or The Dumb Lady Cur'd") and "L'Avare," the latter obtaining the praise of Voltaire, are well known. As also his burlesque of "Tom Thumb." Fielding married in 1735, and in the year following took the little French Theatre in the Haymarket. He announced his troupe as "The Great Mogul's Company of Comedians," and described it as "having dropped from the Clouds." His first venture "Pasquin: a Dramatick Satire on the Times, etc., etc.," proved a great success, and ran for more than forty nights. There is not much plot, it consists of scenes strung together to show the corruption of the Walpole period. His next piece, "The Historical Register for 1736," is of special interest as

having precipitated the "Licensing Act." The play concludes with a dialogue between Quidam (Sir Robert Walpole) and four patriots, to whom he gives a purse which has an instantaneous effect upon their opinions. All five of them go off dancing to Quidam's fiddle; and it is explained that they have holes in their pockets through which the money will fall as they dance, enabling the donor to pick it all up again, and so not lose "one Half-penny by his Generosity." Fielding gave up dramatic writing before he was thirty. As a rule his plays were concocted in haste and to make money. In 1742, after "Joseph Andrews" had appeared, Garrick applied to its author to know if he had "any play by him." This resulted in the production of "The Wedding Day." Fielding does not seem to have believed in it much, but hoped that Garrick would, in modern parlance, have "pulled it through." The little great actor was unequal to the task, although he had the assistance of Mrs. Woffington, Mrs. Pritchard and Macklin. The latter wrote a prologue for it, which he delivered himself. He pretends to recognize Fielding among the audience and pokes fun at his anxieties, telling him he had better have stuck to "honest Abram Adams, who, in spight of Critics, can make his Readers laugh." For further details of Fielding's work for the stage I cannot do better than refer the reader to Mr. Austin Dobson's interesting manual, to which I have been somewhat indebted.

The greatest importance that Fielding's connection with the theatre had, was in the results obtained by his *magnum opus*. It is true that he was over forty years of age when it was written, and that he had increased

leisure, but there can be little question that his experiences in play making and adapting enabled him to bring to such a masterly perfectness the construction of his immortal epic—"Tom Jones." That he knew the difficulties of the drama in its more legitimate or regular form, seems evident from his remark that he "left off writing for the stage when he ought to have begun."

DR. JOHNSON seems to have had over his play "Irene" a serious difference with Garrick, for we find that the Rev. Dr. Taylor was called in to mediate. "Sir," said the Doctor, "the fellow wants me to make Mahomet run mad, that he may have an opportunity of tossing his hands and kicking his heels." The play was produced—Johnson making his appearance on the first night in a scarlet waistcoat laced with gold. It had a patient hearing until nearly the end, when the incident of the bowstring gave the audience an opportunity of finding some relief from the dulness with which many of them had been oppressed. Here is the account which Dr. Adams, who was present, gave to Boswell. "When Mrs. Pritchard, the heroine of the piece, was to be strangled upon the stage and was to speak two lines with the bowstring round her neck, the audience cried out 'Murder! Murder!' She several times attempted to speak, but in vain. At last she was obliged to go off the stage alive." After the first performance, "She was carried off to be put to death behind the scenes." The "business" of strangling "Irene" in sight of the audience was Garrick's—(Mrs. Pritchard by the way was the lady the Doctor on one occasion called "a vulgar idiot," and who, he said, used to speak of her "gownd")—Garrick's zeal carried it

through for nine nights, so that the author had his three nights' profits. Though a failure, Johnson's fees were nearly £200. As he also received from Dodsley £100 for the copyright, it may have enabled him to give that stoical answer recorded: When asked how he felt about the ill-success of his play, he replied "Like the Monument!"

HORACE WALPOLE'S one tragedy, "The Mysterious Mother," is not, as Lord Byron observed, "a puling love play." The author of "Childe Harold" thought very highly of it, but its subject has prevented it from being placed upon the public stage.

SMOLLETT'S attempts at the drama consisted of "The Regicide," a tragedy; "Alceste," an opera; and "The Reprisal, or the Tars of Old England," called a comedy, but really a farce in two acts. His tragedy, written when he was but eighteen, was never acted. Ten years later he wrote a preface to it, in which he railed at the managers "in good set terms." It may be of interest to note that the narrative which influenced him in composing the drama supplied Rossetti with the materials for his magnificent ballad "The King's Tragedy." "Alceste," done for Rich, was also never produced; the author's vanity and temper leading to quarrels which prevented it. The music had been prepared by Handel, who, as lovers of musical lore are aware, afterwards adapted it to Dryden's lesser "Ode for St. Cecilia's Day." Smollett was in truth a dangerous man. Those that offended him he held up to reprobation in his novels and satires. Garrick, Lacy, Rich, Quin, Akenside, Fielding and Lord Lyttelton were so treated. It is fair to say that in some cases

he seems to have repented of his conduct. Notwithstanding his quarrel with Garrick, "The Reprisal" was put upon the stage. The great actor it would seem behaved with liberality in a pecuniary sense, and on the same occasion appeared in one of his popular characters, Lusignan, in the tragedy of "Zara." The farce was intended "to excite the warlike spirit of the nation." Whatever other effect they produce, farces rarely do this in England. The prologue is full of lines of this sort,—

> "Such game our fathers play'd in days of yore,
> When Edward's banners fann'd the Gallic shore;
> When Howard's arm Eliza's vengeance hurl'd
> And Drake diffus'd her fame around the world."

"The Reprisal" is a farce of the coarse kind then in vogue. Not good of its kind either, though it certainly is not dull. It is interspersed with songs. A Frenchman, an Irishman, and a Scotchman figure in it; the tang of each of them giving rare opportunities for the actors in this sort of characterization. The British Sailor is of course very strong and the French nation is treated as something beneath contempt. It finishes up with a sort of compensating speech, in which Lyon, the lieutenant of a man-of-war, says,—

"I was once taken by the French who used me nobly. I'm a witness of their valour, and an instance of their politeness; but there are Champignons in every service. While France uses us like friends, we will return her civilities. When she breaks her treaties, and grows insolent, we will drub her over to her good behaviour."

Then follows a song with a chorus, in which "Brave Britons" and "The British Oak" are not forgotten,

the whole concluding with a long epilogue, the author telling the audience that

> " His pen against the hostile French is drawn,
> Who damns him, is no Antigallican."

It is said that it afterwards became a favourite afterpiece; but enough I think has been written to show that no claim could be set up by the author of " Roderick Random " and " Humphrey Clinker " to the laurels of the dramatist.

HANNAH MORE wrote three plays, and all of them were acted. She adapted Metastasio's drama of " Attilio Regulo," and called it " The Inflexible Captive." It was first put upon the stage of the Bath theatre. Her second tragedy was founded on a French story and called " Percy." It was acted in London, ran for seventeen successive nights, and her profits were 600*l*. The House of Northumberland we are told regarded its production as a personal compliment, the Duke sending her his congratulations. Her third play was " The Fatal Falsehood," which Garrick also helped her with. His death prevented her from witnessing it, though it was presented at Covent Garden in the spring of the same year, Sheridan writing the epilogue. Her friend Mrs. Boscawen sent " five gentlemen with oaken sticks " to applaud, but it ran for only three nights. Both Mrs. Siddons and Miss O'Neill, at later periods, appeared in " Percy," but the popularity and influence of her friend Garrick were assuredly the causes of her success.

FRANCES BURNEY (Madame D'Arblay) was the author of " Edwy and Elgiva," a tragedy acted at

Drury Lane, and a comedy with the title of "Love and Fashion," said to have been accepted by Mr. Harris of Covent Garden, but withdrawn at the request of her father. Campbell tells a story of the first drama, in which Mrs. Siddons acted, which will bear transcribing. "Miss Burney was peculiarly unfortunate in bringing bishops into her tragedy. At that time there was a liquor much in popular use, called Bishop: it was a sort of negus or punch, I believe, though the origin of its name I must leave more learned antiquaries to determine. But be that as it may, when jolly fellows met at a tavern, the first order to the waiter was to bring in the bishop. Unacquainted with the language of taverns, Miss Burney made her King exclaim, in an early scene, 'Bring in the Bishop!' and the summons filled the audience with as much hilarity as if they had drunk of the exhilarating liquor. They continued in the best possible humour throughout the piece. The dying scene made them still more jocose, when a passing stranger proposed, in a tragic tone, to carry the expiring heroine to the other side of a hedge. This hedge, though supposed to be situated remotely from any dwelling, nevertheless proved to be a very accommodating retreat; for, in a few minutes afterwards, the wounded lady was brought from behind it, on an elegant couch, and, after dying in the presence of her husband, was removed once more to the back of the hedge. The solemn accents of the Siddons herself were not a match for this ludicrous circumstance, and she was carried off amidst roars of mirth." Though the bishop and the hedge incidents were incongruous elements, they did not of themselves account for its failure.

WILLIAM GODWIN, the author of "Political Justice" and "Caleb Williams," was another of the disappointed ones. "Antonio, or The Soldier's Return," was declined by Colman for the Haymarket, but produced by John Kemble at Drury Lane Theatre. Besides the manager, Mrs. Siddons and Charles Kemble appeared in it. Talfourd pronounced it "a miracle of dulness." A ragedy called "Abbas, King of Persia," Godwin failed to get accepted. "Faulkner," another drama, was also produced at Drury Lane, but fared no better than "Antonio." The authors of "The Rejected Addresses," in "Horace in London," thus ridiculed him,—

> "Thy flame at Luna's lamp thou light'st,
> Blank is the verse that thou indit'st,
> Thy play is damn'd, yet still thou writ'st,
> My Godwin!"

His great novel, "Caleb Williams," formed the groundwork of "The Iron Chest," by George Colman the Younger; one of the plays in which Edmund Kean is said to have shown his great powers with more than usual effect.

JOANNA BAILLIE'S work is another valuable illustration of the power of influence and fashion. Notwithstanding the high opinions held by Scott, Byron and others as to the fitness of her plays for the stage, they did not prove attractive; even with the advantages of the very best acting. "De Montfort" and "The Family Legend" were the only plays tried. The former was first produced in 1800 with Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble in the cast, and ran for eleven nights. It was revived in 1821, Edmund Kean playing the leading part. Campbell believed that it would from

that time retain a stage popularity; but Kean told him that "though a fine poem, it would never be an acting play." Macready says that Kean in it "shone out in the full splendour of his genius," though he did not himself witness the performance.

"The Family Legend" was first acted in Edinburgh in 1810. Sir Walter Scott interested himself in its preparation. He attended the rehearsals and wrote the prologue. Henry Mackenzie, the author of "The Man of Feeling," supplied an epilogue. Scott in a letter to his friend, the authoress, speaks of "the complete and deserved triumph of the play." It had a run of fourteen nights. Macready records acting in it at Newcastle a year or so after. In 1815 it was presented to a London audience, on which occasion Scott and Byron were present. The loyalty and good offices of the author of "Waverley" are better proved than the play's popularity.

WORDSWORTH, when but five-and-twenty years of age, began his tragedy "The Borderers." Coleridge (himself at work on a play) thought its merit "absolutely wonderful," and he procured for it an introduction to Harris, of Covent Garden. Under date of November 20th, 1797, his sister Dorothy writes,—

"William's play is finished and sent to the managers of the Covent Garden Theatre. We have not the faintest expectation that it will be accepted."

An actor who had read the play and commended it, suggested certain changes, and asked the author to come to London to make these. Wordsworth and his sister therefore went up and spent three weeks in town. Another letter of Dorothy's says, "We have been in

London; our business was the play; and the play is rejected."

It is not easy now to associate Wordsworth with the idea of a successful play in the theatre. He had, it may be remarked, the satisfaction of hammering with his stick at the first performance of his friend Talfourd's poetic play, "Ion."

When SIR WALTER SCOTT was about eight-and-twenty, he wrote a play called "The House of Aspen," which was sent to London, and, according to Lockhart, put into rehearsal and afterwards abandoned. This lack of encouragement was a happy circumstance. His stories still delight us, his plays probably would long since have been condemned to obscurity. Scott speaks of his first attempt as "a hurried dramatic sketch" which might rank "with 'The Castle Spectre,' 'Bluebeard' and other drum and trumpet exhibitions of the day." Apart from translations, his work in dramatic form consists of "The Doom of Devorgoil," "Macduff's Cross," "Halidon Hill," and "Auchindrane, or the Ayrshire Tragedy." None of these were put upon the stage, and the only one of his novels in which he had a hand, in fitting for the theatre, was "Guy Mannering." It was done to help his friend, Daniel Terry the actor, through whom his interest in the theatre seems to have been mainly kept alive. The success of "Rob Roy" in London, dramatized by Isaac Pocock, rather surprised him. But in his letters to Terry at various times, he glances at the stage possibilities of "Old Mortality," "The Heart of Mid-Lothian" and "Ivanhoe." "St. Ronan's Well" he did not think suitable for the theatre, but confessed,

when he saw the acted version at Edinburgh, that "it succeeded wonderfully," thanks to the acting of William Murray and Mackay. The drama, however, that has a greater interest for us, is that in which he himself played such a heroic part in getting free from his overwhelming responsibilities. It is pathetic to read of his turning out "The Doom of Devorgoil" in order to try and make a little money. After discussing the chances of its bringing in something for the copyright, he said to Mr. Skene, "If they can get the beast to lead or drive they may bring it on the stage if they like." The "spirit-stirring" "Bonnie Dundee" is from the latter play. Scott's dramatic powers we shall have occasion to refer to again.

Like his immediate predecessors, Wordsworth and Scott, COLERIDGE was but young when his first original dramatic efforts were made. "Robespierre," of which he wrote the first act, was printed when he was twenty-two, and "Remorse"—or "Osorio" as it was called—was written a year or two afterwards. The latter seems to have been made at the instigation of Sheridan. All he did that can be recalled, was to make a bad joke on the cavern scene, with its water from the roof—its drip, drip, drip, suggesting to the author of "The Rivals" that "it was all dripping." Years afterwards, by the influence of Lord Byron and Mr. Whitbread, it was acted at Drury Lane, ran for twenty nights, and probably brought its author two or three hundred pounds. The following year he was encouraged to write "Zapolya," but it was declined by the two principal theatres. There were no parts in it for Kean or Miss O'Neill, even if it had been acceptable. It imitated

"The Winter's Tale" in its lapse of twenty years. In his preface to the printed play, Coleridge says, "I shall be well content if my readers will take it up, read it, and judge it, as a Christmas tale." His great translations of the "Wallensteins" ask but a passing mention here. In a letter to John Murray, dated August 31, 1814, which has just been made public, there is interesting evidence that Coleridge had the idea of a version of "Faust" for the stage—the publisher having invited him to undertake a translation of Goethe's great work.

CHARLES LAMB never seems to have lost the ambition of becoming successful on the stage. For some of the details which follow, I am indebted to Canon Ainger's interesting notes attached to his edition of the "Poems and Plays." The latter consisted of the tragedy "Pride's Cure" (afterwards called "John Woodvil"), a two-act farce, "Mr. H," a tragi-comedy founded on Crabbe's "Confidant," which was entitled "The Wife's Trial," and a farce called "The Pawnbroker's Daughter." Of "John Woodvil," which was declined by John Kemble, Southey writes to Charles Danvers in 1801, "Lamb is printing his play, which will please you by the exquisite beauty of its poetry, and provoke you by the exquisite silliness of its story." "Mr. H" was produced at Drury Lane Theatre in 1806 with Elliston in the leading part, but was acted for one night only. Lamb accepted his defeat with the greatest good humour, and it is said "was probably the loudest hisser in the house." Three months after, it went to America, and was reported to have enjoyed in Philadelphia "a considerable run," probably with re-

construction or modification. Lamb tried Kemble again with "The Wife's Trial," but without success. The idea of the essay with the droll title, "On the Inconveniences resulting from being Hanged," was utilized in "The Pawnbroker's Daughter." In 1828 it was submitted to the elder Mathews for the Adelphi, but did not meet with acceptance. After vainly seeking an appearance at other theatres, it was published in *Blackwood's Magazine* for January, 1830.

The great name of WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR cannot be connected with the stage practically. His work in dramatic form consists of the tragedy of "Count Julian" and the trilogy "Andrea of Hungary," "Giovanna of Naples," and "Fra Rupert," "The Siege of Ancona," "Ines de Castro," and other fragments. He seems at one time to have had the notion of getting "Count Julian" produced by John Kemble; but in Moxon's edition of 1846 he says that "none of them were offered to the stage, being no better than *Imaginary Conversations* in metre." He confessed to Macready that he had not the constructive faculty, that he could only "set persons talking, all the rest was chance." Mr. Colvin says that in construction the four plays of Robert Landor are better than his brother's. In a letter to Southey, Walter Landor speaks of having committed a tragedy to the flames, called "Ferranti and Giulio."

THOMAS MOORE'S right to be included in my list is derived from his having written and composed a comic opera in three acts called "M.P., or the Blue Stocking," which was performed at the Lyceum Theatre in 1811. It was not successful and kept the stage for

but a few nights. Nor was it published in his collected works, although some of the songs, which appeared separately, it is said "well maintained his lyrical reputation."

LEIGH HUNT'S principal dramatic work was the beautiful "Legend of Florence," founded on a romance of real life, and written in six weeks. Although it enjoyed considerable success, it has not the elements of general popularity. It was first presented at Covent Garden, February 7th, 1840, with Messrs. Anderson, Bartley, G. Vandenhoff and Miss Ellen Tree in the cast. It was witnessed several times by her Majesty, then a young queen. Ten years later it was revived at Sadler's Wells, and on the 23rd January, 1852, was performed, by her Majesty's command, at Windsor Castle. Leigh Hunt lived to see the production in 1858 of his three-act play called "Lovers' Amazements," in which Charles Dillon played the leading part. There are three other plays of Leigh Hunt's which have neither been printed nor acted, I believe: "The Secret Marriage," afterwards called "The Prince's Marriage;" "The Double," a two-act piece; and "Look to your Morals," a little prose comedy.

Of LORD BYRON'S dramas, "Manfred," "Marino Faliero," "Sardanapalus," "The Two Foscari," and "Werner" have been acted; but I think it will be seen that their acceptance has been due to what I have called side issues. "Werner" was certainly one of Macready's most popular characters, and it was afterwards acted by Phelps. In the case of the former it seems to have been attributable to certain idiosyncrasies of the actor that were common to phases of Byron's conceptions.

The story and construction of "Werner" belong to the adapter of the tale from which it is derived, Miss Harriet Lee. Byron said, "The whole is neither intended nor in any shape adapted for the stage." In its tasteful revival a few years since, specially brought about by the generosity of Mr. Henry Irving for the benefit of Dr. Westland Marston, an opportunity was afforded of seeing it strengthened in its plot and produced under the best conditions, but few, I think, who were present will contend that the play for its own sake was worthy of resuscitation. Some of the characters are very effective, but it is, to use an old phrase, "steeped in such an atmosphere of gloom," and, what is more important, the feminine characters are entirely subordinate. A dramatic version of Miss Lee's story was prepared by herself and acted for a few nights at Covent Garden Theatre, under the title of "The Three Strangers." Miss Mitford also mentions having accidentally found the MS. of another version at Kirkley Hall (Mr. Ogle's seat), Sheridan, who had been on a visit there, having carelessly left it behind him. Miss Mitford speaks of it as by far the best adaptation of the story known to her. It was a prose play called "Siegendorf;" but its author was unknown. "Manfred" has less construction than "Werner." Byron thought he had rendered the former "quite impossible for the stage," and declared it to be "as mad as Nat Lee's Bedlam tragedy." "Marino Faliero," in opposition to the poet's wishes, was brought out at Drury Lane by Elliston in 1821, and revived in an altered form as "The Doge of Venice" at the same theatre in 1867. "Sardanapalus" Byron believed the

managers would not be able to get hold of, but he was wrong. It was acted by Macready, Charles Kean and others, and since their day has been made attractive, by elaborate scenic effects, to which it readily lends itself.

MISS MITFORD, the delightful author of "Our Village," turned her attention to dramatic writing in order to make money for the support of those who were dependent on her, and was able to realize considerable sums by her plays. They enjoyed such "runs" as were possible at the time she was popular. Her dramatic work that was actually presented consists of "Julian," a tragedy, played in 1823 by Macready for eight nights. From his own account it had "but moderate success," though its author received 200*l.* for it; "Foscari," produced in 1826; "Rienzi," acted at Drury Lane in 1828, with Young as the hero; "Charles the First," the forbidden play, which George Colman and the Duke of Montrose declined to license in 1825—as also the Duke of Devonshire in 1831—it being eventually played at the Victoria Theatre (1834) that house being beyond the jurisdiction of the Lord Chamberlain; "Sadak and Kalascade," an opera performed at the Lyceum in 1835, and "Inez de Castro," intended for Young and Charles Kemble, but which was not seen till years afterwards, at a minor theatre (The City of London, 1841). Dramas that she projected, or failed to get produced, bore the titles of "The King of Poland," "Fiesco," "Otto of Wittelsbach," and "Thomas à Becket." She was also at one time very anxious to undertake the libretto of a grand opera on the subject of "Cupid and Psyche," for which she wanted Weber to supply the music.

BRYAN WALLER PROCTER (better known perhaps by his pseudonym of "BARRY CORNWALL"), the father of Miss Adelaide Procter, wrote a tragedy called "Mirandola," which was produced by Macready at Covent Garden in 1821. Its success was beyond all question, although it attained to no after popularity. Procter's generous recognition of Sheridan Knowles, when but an untried author, deserves mention also. He wrote a graceful epilogue for "Virginius" and induced Hamilton Reynolds to supply a prologue.

There are two letters of SHELLEY'S (July and September, 1819), included in Mr. H. Buxton Forman's edition of the poet's works, showing how much he desired that the "Cenci" should be acted. The private performance at Islington a few years since before a select audience is, I believe, the only occasion on which the tragedy has ever been placed upon the stage. It is not to the purpose here to bring forward reasons against a rendering of this great work before a mixed assembly such as constitutes an audience of to-day. If the treatment rose to the level of the drama, the wisdom of presenting it might well be doubted.

LORD JOHN RUSSELL, in his early days, was an enthusiastic playgoer and an amateur actor—often as a boy acting in the theatrical entertainments at Woburn Abbey. Mr. Spencer Walpole says that to read his early diaries induces one "to think that Lord John was nurtured in a play-house." When he was but a lad he commenced a drama, in which "Alonzo, the right King of Spain, is living in exile, and earning his bread as a fisherman, while Diego, a usurper, occupies his throne." Before he was thirty-six he had published "Don Carlos,

or Persecution," a tragedy in five acts, which went through five editions in the year it was issued. It was never, I believe, publicly acted.

It seems to have been owing to the solicitation of two divines, Heber and Milman (the latter a successful dramatist), that MRS. HEMANS submitted "The Vespers of Palermo" to the management of Covent Garden Theatre. It was acted in 1823 with Young, Charles Kemble and Miss F. H. Kelly in the cast. Its author was not present at the representation, and its failure was attributed by her friends to the inefficiency of Miss Kelly's acting—or, as Kemble more delicately put it, "to a singularity of intonation in one of the actresses." Mrs. Hemans's friend, Joanna Baillie, by her influence with Sir Walter Scott, was enabled to get it tried afterwards at Edinburgh, the great novelist writing an epilogue, "stuffed," as he said, "with parish jokes and bad puns." Two years after Mrs. Hemans's death a play by her was discovered, called "De Chatillon, or the Crusader." She endeavoured in it to avoid "that redundancy of poetic diction" complained of in her first attempt. It was not presented.

THOMAS HOOD, the author of "The Bridge of Sighs," never had a play produced, but a note of his son's affixed to a remark on his attempts at dramatic writing in the "Memorials of Thomas Hood" by his daughter, says, "I have, by the kindness of Mr. Benjamin Webster, become possessed of the original manuscript of a farce 'York and Lancaster.' Mr. Mark Lemon has also been good enough to send me a portion of another farce."

HENRY TAYLOR—or SIR HENRY TAYLOR, as he

became—is, as I have remarked, better known for his noble dramatic poem, "Philip van Artevelde," than any other work. It was produced by Macready in 1847, but did not enjoy any success in the theatre. The despondent actor, in his diary, writes, "Acted 'Philip van Artevelde.' Failed; I cannot think it my fault. . . I am very unhappy; my toil and life are thrown away, etc., etc." He attributed its want of success to under-acting; but it certainly was not due to this altogether. The author's other dramatic works are "A Sicilian Summer," "Isaac Comnenus," "Edwin the Fair," "St. Clement's Eve" and "The Virgin Widow."

RICHARD HENRY HORNE, perhaps best known to the general public by his "Orion" (published with satirical intent at a farthing), did not gain success in the theatre, although that jewel of condensed passion, the one-act tragedy, "The Death of Marlowe," alone gives him the title of true dramatist. He was also the author of "Cosmo de Medicis," "The Death Fetch," "Gregory the Seventh," and "Alsargis," the last-named play being produced at Drury Lane Theatre in 1856.

RICHARD COBDEN'S name as a play-writer is more a curiosity than anything else. The only evidence I have of his being a dramatist is that he once wrote a play called "The Phrenologist," which he submitted to the management of Drury Lane Theatre in the time of Price and old Reynolds. The fact came out when he was endeavouring in 1843 to secure the same building for purposes of the Anti-Corn Law League.

"Alarcos: a Tragedy by Disraeli the Younger," is the title-page to a play published by Mr. Colburn in the early days of her Majesty's reign, when its author was

but thirty-four. It was acted in 1868 at Astley's Theatre, but the experiment does not seem to have been successful. Eleven years later it was revived at the Crystal Palace. One of our most accomplished critics, speaking of the play on the occasion of the latter performance, says, "The decay of faith in tragic terrors may justly be held accountable in some degree for the weakness of the impression left by the performance;" but that the "interpretation was not of a kind to lay Lord Beaconsfield under any great obligations." And further, "There are some truly dramatic situations in the play, and there may be found in old collections many a piece inferior in power which has yet moved audiences, and even enjoyed a sustained popularity." The play was founded on an old Spanish ballad, and is prolific in details of the grimmest and most terrible nature. It abounds in old-fashioned melodramatic expressions, like "rash caitiff," "unhand me, sir," "will no pest descend upon her blood," etc. There is a Moor in the play who hires himself to cut throats, and is addressed "Dusk infidel." Nor is there any lack of "effects;" for serenades, screams, the tolling of bells, the blowing of trumpets and horns, and death-dealing thunderbolts are a few of the agencies employed. I am not aware how far the revival of the play was encouraged by Lord Beaconsfield, if at all, but it is certain that this early effort does not show that his gifts and acquirements lay in the direction of the drama.

It has often been remarked that few novelists of any eminence have escaped the ordeal of being dramatized more successfully than THACKERAY. In this respect he fared differently to his great contemporary, Dickens.

But he was not to go entirely free. A comic play called "Jeames" by Mr. Burnand was, in 1878, constructed from "Jeames's Diary," and presented at the Gaiety Theatre. Quite recently his "Rose and the Ring" also was adapted by Mr. Savile Clarke, and acted in London. Thackeray seems to have been always rather ambitious for stage honours. About the year 1854 he wrote a play himself, called "The Wolves and the Lamb," which was offered to Alfred Wigan for the Olympic Theatre, and to Buckstone for the Haymarket, but not accepted by either manager. In an amateur way it was produced twice at the great novelist's new house. Mr. Merivale, who was associated with its production, has furnished some very interesting details. "Thackeray declined a 'speaking part' on the ground that he couldn't possibly learn such poor words, and only appeared as the clerical papa, just before the fall of the curtain, to hold out his hands and say, 'Bless you, my children,' in pantomime to actors and audience. And a pretty, gracious, memorable sight, and a sound of much applause, and no little tearfulness it was, when Thackeray so came forward to welcome his friends and guests for the first time to the new house he had just built himself on Palace Green." The play bill was headed "W. Empty House," the place being still unfurnished except for the occasion. It was a pun on his initials. "The Wolves and the Lamb" afterwards became "Lovel, the Widower," the first instalment of which appeared in the newly-born *Cornhill Magazine* for January, 1860.

That in the year 1832, when Sheridan Knowles's play of "The Hunchback" was being prepared at

Covent Garden, the stage-manager, Bartley, should have received an application from a young man of twenty to become an actor, and that an appointment should have been made for him to attend at the theatre on a certain day and give Charles Kemble "a taste of his quality" out of the elder Mathews's entertainment, in the imitations of which he thought himself proficient, is not very remarkable; but it does strike us now as curious that this young aspirant should have been CHARLES DICKENS, and that the accident of an illness prevented him from keeping his appointment, and by a strange fate turned his energies into a different groove. The fact of his going to some theatre, as he tells us "every night, with very few exceptions for three years," sufficiently indicates the strength of his passion for the play—a passion that he never really lost. It is, I hope, generally agreed that it is well that his efforts should have been made as an amateur, for the world would have been poorer without "David Copperfield." The power that Dickens achieved as a novelist did not quite stifle his ambition also as a dramatist, though his attempts in this direction have not augmented his reputation. His two-act farce of "The Strange Gentleman' ("The Great Winglebury Duel" of the "Sketches"), and a short opera, "The Village Coquettes," were produced at the St. James's Theatre when he was but twenty-four years old. The year following, "Is She His Wife, or Something Singular," a tiny farce, not mentioned by Forster, in which, as in "The Strange Gentleman," Harley acted, was put upon the stage. Neither of the farces give any indication of Dickens's great power, and might have been the work of any competent stock play-wright.

Another farce called "The Lamplighter," done for Covent Garden, but which his biographer says "the actors could not agree about," shows more of his own humorous insight and perception; though the doings of Mr. Stargazer and Mr. Mooney are a little wild even for farce. He turned it into a story, which was a contribution to "The Pic-nic Papers," for the benefit of the widow of his old publisher Macrone. We find that in 1837 Dickens is haunted by the notion of doing a high-class comedy for Macready. It was to have been called "No Thoroughfare," a title used in later years for a Christmas number. His offer to Macready of a dramatic version of "Oliver Twist" is also well known. He had a hand in "Mr. Nightingale's Diary," Mark Lemon's farce, written for the Guild of Literature. Conventionality is unavoidable in plays of a humorous type. Dickens realized this clearly. He was to have written the farce alone, but was prevented by circumstances from doing so. In a letter he says, "I have written the first scene, and it has droll points in it—'more farcical points than you commonly find in farces,' really better. Yet I am constantly striving for my reputation's sake to get into it a meaning that is impossible in a farce, etc., etc."

The greatest reverence for the genius of BROWNING is, I hope, compatible with the belief that his dramas, as plays for the stage, can never be popular. Dramatic scenes it must be evident by this, even when touched to the loftiest and subtlest issues, though desirable, if not indispensable qualities in a play, do not of themselves make one. Also that "dramatic poetry," as Browning called it, and as he was well aware, is but a

constituent part of a great drama. That a popular success in the theatre would have gratified him there can be little doubt; but he can hardly have been unconscious later in his career of what unfitted him for theatrical success. Few realized the power of Shakespeare and the Elizabethan dramatists more than he did. Witness the noble optimism of "At the Mermaid":—

> "Look and tell me; written, spoken,
> Here's my life work: and where—
> Where's your warrant or my token,
> I'm the dead king's son and heir?"

And yet there are passages in his work to which the epithet "Shakespearian" seems the only one to apply. We have but to turn to "Luria" and other performances in the "Bells and Pomegranates" series. But the "sort of pit audience" in the theatre itself would have to be such as could understand, and be moved by not only the popular elements in "Hamlet," "Macbeth," and "Othello," but by the greatness of "Troilus," "Measure for Measure," or "Richard the Second."

Browning seems first to have conceived the idea of a play for the stage on the subject of Narses. He told Macready that he had "*bit* him" by his performance of Othello. "I told him," says the tragedian, "I hoped I should make the blood come." "Strafford" was produced at Covent Garden Theatre in 1837, but without success. Browning's second essay was with "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon," which was given at Drury Lane in 1843. Phelps played the part intended for Macready, and Miss Helen Faucit was the Mildred. Mrs. Stirling and Mr. James Anderson also appeared in it. It would be an ungracious task to enlarge on the causes of his

difference with Macready. Details as to these were given by Mr. Moy Thomas in his interesting dramatic gossip in the *Daily News* two years since. They were gathered from letters written to the editor, Mr. Frank Hill, in 1884. Mrs. Sutherland Orr has, in her "Life of Browning," given them *in extenso*.

The *Athenæum* (Feb. 18, 1843) spoke of "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon" as a "poetic melodrama," and called it "a very puzzling and unpleasant piece of business." It does not seem to have had very fair treatment, if we may believe the statements that have been made. It was produced on the same night that a new farce was given—"A Thumping Legacy"—and the opera of "Der Freischutz," and it is said without Browning's name. It was played only three nights. It might have consoled the poet had he known that the "pit audience," some yet unborn, would be found eventually outside the walls of the theatre. Their commendation, if less noisy, has been more lasting. The play was revived by Phelps at Sadler's Wells in 1848. The late Mr. Lawrence Barrett is said to have obtained in America success with the play in a modified and altered form. In 1853 "Colombe's Birthday" was played at the Haymarket, with Miss Faucit in the part of the heroine. Mrs. Browning declared it to be "a *succès d'estime* and something more," though she thought Miss Faucit alone did it full justice. It ran for a fortnight, I believe.

The private performances of the Browning Society, honourably associated with the name of Miss Alma Murray and others, will be fresh in the public memory. Browning's name is the last on my list.

It will be noted that, with few exceptions, the writers

have aimed at producing tragedy, or have dealt with things

> "That bear a weighty and a serious brow,
> Sad, high, and working, full of state and woe,"

but, whether the attempts have been made in tragedy, comedy or farce, it cannot be said, seeing with what great and various gifts they were endowed, that in the true sense they were unequal to the task. Is there any special reason why the majority of these great writers failed to obtain success in the theatre? The question, I think, may be answered in the affirmative. There is no individuality so potent as to be independent of circumstances, and unless circumstances have enabled an author to become possessed of the requirements of the theatre, either by close study of a practical kind, or by absolute connection with it, as actor or manager, it is unlikely that he will be able to command the success he looks for. The dramatist cannot easily work by himself. It is largely in conjunction with the actor's art that he must look for the means of achieving success. How far the power of Richard Burbage influenced the genius of his friend and companion, Shakespeare, we shall never know. Notwithstanding all his gifts of humour and characterization, it is certain, too, that if the young Poquelin had not been an actor, he would not have realized the force and effect of those situations that he showed such genius in fitting and adapting to his own purposes. Without this, Plautus and Terence would have been of little avail. It would be easy to give the names of many dramatists of the past, whose gifts were encouraged by a close association with the theatre. Much of their work, from various causes, would fail to

attract now, but such play-wrights—to name but a few —as Goldsmith, Holcroft, Brinsley Sheridan, Sheridan Knowles, the Colmans, Planché, the Mortons, Douglas Jerrold, Bulwer, Charles Reade, Tom Taylor, Westland Marston, and Dion Boucicault, would not have succeeded as they did, without fulfilling the conditions I have mentioned as necessary. But the art of the dramatist is one thing, that of the play-wright another, and a combination runs upon that fine line which, though rarely attained, gives to the theatre a permanent repertoire.

CHAPTER II.

SUCCESSFUL PLAYS AND HOW TO ESTIMATE THEM.

TAKING for the moment, and for the purposes of our consideration, a successful play to be synonymous with a good play, we will adopt the former term. It must be clear even if we agree upon what is or is not a successful piece, that the estimate can be taken from different standpoints. A review of these may enable us to ascertain whether there is any standard of success which can be adopted, and if so, what it is.

There are four points of view from which the success of a play can be estimated. There is that of the author, the manager, the actor, and the public or audience.

The author's incentive may be money, or reputation, or both. He may confess to other motives, but should he be to any extent successful, solid rewards and some renown will await him. Lord Lytton stated that he had two objects in composing his most popular play ("The Lady of Lyons"). The first was to serve the higher interests of the drama through Macready; the second to prove to "certain critics" that it was not out of his power to attain to dramatic construction and effect on the boards of the theatre.

How far the higher interests were contributed to, in

what he calls "a very slight and trivial performance," we will not now inquire. There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of his statements. The play was a gift to his friend Macready. If this had not been so, the monetary inducements alone could not have been a sufficiently tempting bait, in those days, to a busy and already popular author. As he consented to the play being produced anonymously, it is not easy to believe that the primary purpose was to augment his reputation. The manager's object is to make money. Our theatres having no government or public subsidy, it is only natural that he should produce such plays as he believes will fill his treasury. The manager of a theatre, like the publisher of a book, is a business man and follows the ordinary laws of supply and demand. The actor's view of success differs from that of author and manager, inasmuch as besides the necessity of making money he is anxious to appear in effective characters, or "parts," to use the technical phrase. I am now assuming that the actor is not a manager. Good "parts" mean popularity with an audience, and as a consequence increased reputation and pecuniary reward. The standpoint of the public is to be interested, excited or amused. The theatre is the place in which it looks for entertainment, and from which it absents itself if not found there. Should the diversion co-exist with artistic treatment and "Æsthetics," so much the better, but these for their own sake have never yet been sufficient attraction. And there are times, such as those of political excitement, etc., when the very best entertainments, with these aids, will fail to bring money to the treasury. But of this hereafter. It may be asked if it be not often

the case that poor plays with parts in them that give good opportunities to the actors, will delight and amuse the public and also enrich the manager. Most assuredly; and when this is so the piece is said to be "made by the acting." The phrase, though usual, is scarcely the right one. No work that is really poor can be actually transformed by such treatment, but the actor's art is able to endow it with a vitality and an appearance of real merit that is marvellous. We are thus brought to one of the side issues I have mentioned, namely, that the success has been due to certain treatment. By a careful review of the four standpoints, then, it would seem that we must look for something beyond this for the definition of a successful play. That we shall find, I think, only by ascertaining how any work stands the test of time. And here I cannot do better than quote a few lines from Hazlitt, who though by no means infallible, was a scholarly critic of considerable acumen :—

"When we speak of a good tragedy or comedy, we mean one that will be thought so fifty years hence. Not that we would have it supposed that a work, to be worth anything, must last always; but we think that a play that only runs its one-and-twenty nights, that does not reach beyond the life of an actor, or the fashion of a single generation, may be fairly set down as good for nothing, to any purposes of criticism, or serious admiration."

These lines appeared in the year 1820. Hazlitt has been previously speaking of the period as one that was not dramatic, and states that there had "hardly been a good tragedy or a good comedy written within the last fifty years, that is, since the time of Home's "Douglas"

and Sheridan's "School for Scandal."[1] Now, although the above definition is but a partial one, I think it will help us in meeting the difficulty.

It is not to be assumed that because a play does not prove attractive after an interval of half a century it is therefore poor or worthless. It would be manifestly unfair to apply the same test to a comedy as to a drama, the motor of which is the conflict of the profoundest passions incident to humanity. It is nearly three hundred years since "Othello" was written, but to-night in some country booth that masterpiece will gain the plaudits of an uncultured audience; while at the same hour in London there will sit a mixed assemblage enjoying, as it did in Shakespeare's time, some play that after its butterfly existence will never see the light again. With whatever skill and cleverness a play is prepared, if it be unable to draw money, it must from the manager's standpoint be looked upon as a failure. There are few exceptions to this rule. Seeing that he provides the medium—that is theatres, actors, scenery, etc.—by which it can appeal to an audience, it is obvious that he is the all-important factor in the business. A play unacted somewhat resembles a song unsung, its pecuniary value coming from its publicity. It cannot be expected that he will keep a play in the bills that may "fit audience find, though few," for the sake of giving his author reputation, or his actors "parts" that they fancy. But here we are stopped by another side-

[1] Later in the same year Knowles's "Virginius" was produced, which obtained the critic's commendation. It should be remembered that Knowles and Hazlitt were personal friends. The latter was called by the author of "Virginius" his "mental father.'

issue ; a play may be so inadequately or inappropriately cast as to be condemned, or obtain less success than it would have enjoyed with a competent interpretation. The original production of "The Rivals" is to some extent a case in point, though its first night's failure was due also to other causes. It may be thought that if the play itself be satisfactory there will be a wide margin of toleration for its treatment. Possibly; but it requires a subtle critic to know exactly how far it has been affected by its rendering. The judgment passed on a play, like that on a picture, poem, or novel, must be relative, but my experience leads me to believe that an English audience generally errs on the side of indulgence rather than harshness: on the other hand it is easy to remember instances, by no means uncommon, where by the skill and exertions of the actors, an unmistakably bad piece has been made to appear on its initial performance an absolute triumph. A "première" is a misleading occasion, and sometimes it happens that all but a few quidnuncs are completely deceived. It would be comic, if so many serious interests were not at stake, to see how actors will now and then do their best in trying to coax or bully a play into success.

Where, as is often the case, the manager is an actor himself, taking part in the play, motives of vanity or pique, or a disinclination to accept failure, will induce him to try and force the most hopeless production. Trying to convince playgoers that they are wrong is not a cheap form of amusement. The public is "after all not the worst judge." But it must not be forgotten that the manager's position is now, under the best possible circumstances, one of extreme difficulty. Besides present-

ing the plays submitted for approbation, with such a cast of characters as he believes will do justice to them and attract the public, he must put them upon the stage not only with correctness of detail in scenery and costume, but with an artistic completeness and liberality that have never before been equalled. Archives and museums must be ransacked, continental picture collections must be overhauled, and he must call to his aid the assistance of Associates and Royal Academicians. He must, in short, spare neither time, trouble nor money in trying to reach perfection. It often happens as with other banquets, that the dishes and appointments are richer than the viands served up; but the public has been taught to look for this costly display, and with the keenness of competition what was once a luxury has become a necessity. Without this elaborate treatment many plays would have no chance of proving acceptable. With the manager, therefore, the effort has become a greater speculation than ever. The risks of the dramatic author are in their way as great as that of the manager. Mention has been made of the penalties of popularity in connection with a young and inexperienced writer. If a great first success has been obtained, he will be overwhelmed with applications for plays from which a like result is hoped for. The danger is that the dramatist, like any other artiste—for an artiste he must be—is apt to be measured by his own standard, and in his anxiety to retain his popularity and to "make hay while the sun shines" is tempted to do work in haste, and which, as a consequence, is poor and unsatisfactory.

Now it cannot be too clearly understood that an

original play is a growth, a construction, a something made or built up. Failure in realizing this apparently simple truth is apt to be misleading. There are wonderful stories told of the rapidity with which some dramas have been produced, but the mere putting them into the form of manuscript, within a certain time, is no proof of rapid construction—it tends rather to show that the materials must have been latent in the brain of the author. That he may not himself be aware of it is easily believed. It was a growth of which he was not conscious. Shakespeare's friends and editors left it on record that "His mind and hand went together," but the absence of the "blot in his papers" cannot disprove the complexity of mental processes. As the late Charles Reade once reminded me, "Shakespeare has not made *many* great plays." In the specially constructive sense he meant. It would seem that there is a limit even to intuitive genius, if I may so express it. The difficulty of an author standing in his own way, may be illustrated by a couple of stories of Sheridan. The first comes from Kelly, the composer and music-seller. [It was Kelly whom Sheridan told when he proposed to open wine vaults under the Opera House, to write over the door, "Michael Kelly, Composer of Wines and Importer of music."]

Kelly having learnt that Sheridan was writing a comedy which he expected to finish shortly, met him one day in Piccadilly. "I asked him," he says, "if he had told the Queen that he was writing a play. He said he had, and he was actually about one. 'Not you,' said I to him, 'you will never write again, you are afraid to write.' 'Of whom am I afraid?' said he,

fixing his penetrating eye on me. I said, 'You are afraid of the author of the 'School for Scandal.'" The second story is ascribed to Garrick. When he heard that the comedy just mentioned was going to be produced by Sheridan, he remarked, "He has great things against pleasing the town." "What are they?" was the question. "His powerful Rivals."

Although success to a dramatic author in these days may bring very substantial pecuniary rewards, the most popular name is not necessarily a guarantee against complete failure. It constantly happens that plays which have exacted from their makers months of the closest brain work, that have tested the abilities of the very best available actors, and that have cost the manager not only great labour and anxiety but large sums of money, will on the second performance not bring to the treasury enough to pay the night's expenses, and in some cases not even pay for the lighting of the house. A play now-a-days will "do" or it will "not do." There are no half-measures, or if so, they must be taken as the exception. Your work may contain the most brilliant dialogue and scenes that are pregnant with beauty and passion, but if the piece as a whole does not satisfy, your efforts will have been vain. Even tried authors of great experience, with the full consciousness of the risk attending all ventures on the stage, find it difficult to accept failure with equanimity. It is very hard to see the result of months of continuous mental labour condemned in a few hours—and not unnatural to find authors fall foul of their audiences for what they often assert to be a want of appreciation. That the expression of such disappointment is not confined to

the present time, we can realize on reading the lines prefixed to that Ode of Ben Jonson's "To Himself":—

"The just indignation the author took at the Vulgar Censure of his play, 'The New Inn,' by some malicious spectators, begat this following," etc., etc.

The ode itself is worth turning to. Cowley, too, in his preface to "Cutter of Coleman Street," must have been sensitive on the subject of its failure. He says: "There is no writer but may fail sometimes in point of wit; and it is no less frequent for the auditors to fail in point of judgment. I perceive plainly by daily experience that Fortune is mistress of the theatre, as Tully says it is of all popular assemblies. No man can tell sometimes from whence the invisible winds rise that move them."

Congreve's "Way of the World" was so badly received that it was one of the reasons that determined him to write no more for the stage. Colley Cibber, a thoroughly successful playwright, bitterly complained that his "Love in a Riddle," written in opposition to the renowned "Beggar's Opera," did not succeed; and attributed it to "the lamentable want of taste in the town"! and Steele was equally disgusted that his "Lying Lovers" proved unattractive. "The Tatler" was yet unborn, and its editor had something in store better than dull and sententious plays. Fielding also, after the failure of his farce "Eurydice," printed it with the note, "As it was d—mned at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane." But to return to the question of what is or is not a successful play. It is clear, I think, that we must strike some sort of a balance from the different standpoints that have been enumerated. Appropriate acting and sympathetic treatment, as we have seen, may

render a poor play successful from the manager's point of view. It may, in fact, draw money in London, the Provinces, America and so forth, but may not prove either strong or attractive enough to bear revival when its first course is run. Consequently, though it may have thoroughly fulfilled its purpose, it will not answer to any test of time. It is in the nature of things that it should be so. Much of what pertains to the theatre is purely ephemeral. It cannot be otherwise while recreation is the main purpose for which theatres are frequented. Taking into account the enormous mass of material in dramatic form that makes a bid for popular favour, it is astonishing how little has any real permanence. The inference then seems to be that by the test of time the number of successful acting plays must be regarded as very limited. I think we must look upon the deduction as a sound one. There is not much wisdom in sighing after an unattainable ideal. The stress and wear and tear of modern life make men and women turn naturally enough to what will lighten their burdens and dissipate their anxieties, and we cannot wonder that they look for

> "Sport that wrinkled Care derides,
> And Laughter holding both his sides."

Without being too precise, and taking a much less exacting estimate than Hazlitt—for fifty years is a long spell—it may be said that *A sympathetic and well-constructed drama that yields the fullest opportunities to a clever company of actors in their respective lines, and that will stand a reasonable test of time, comes under the head of a successful play.*

Of the word "sympathetic" in this connection I

shall have more to say in considering the qualities necessary or desirable in a playwright. For the present it may be accepted that this attribute of sympathy may be of more importance to the success of a play than skilled construction or truthful delineation of character. In speaking of "a clever company of actors" some qualification is necessary as to the extent of its power. A company that shines with great brilliance in a modern drama, is sometimes robbed of all its lustre when trying to interpret any of our fine old comedies. A good performance of "As You Like It," or "The Clandestine Marriage," "The School for Scandal," or "She Stoops to Conquer," is a delight of the highest order; but if the rendering be feeble or incompetent from the lack of power, the result will be a weariness to the flesh and a vexation to the spirit; particularly to whose who know and have seen what is possible with these fine plays. The additional striving after scenic attraction seems but an aggravation of the offence. Frequently realism defeats its own ends in this respect, and shows what an inefficient substitute it is for gaiety, wit, humour, graceful fancy and intellectual delight. How often we have felt that much of the display was "from the purpose of playing" and that we could have heartily welcomed the "Wooden O" treatment once more. Fine plays, under such circumstances, yield their opportunities to no purpose whatever.

Moderately good actors in Cicero's day were, he says, rare. As the very highest gifts for the acting of old comedy now, are about as scarce as, say the power of adequately interpreting the poetic drama, it is evident that the most successful plays are not put upon the

stage without some difficulty. It is not in accordance with my plan here to enter into any details of the actor's art farther than they may serve to illustrate play making, or I might endeavour to find a reason for this.

Saying that a play yields its fullest opportunities to a company of gifted and trained actors even when they have the requisite power, is only implying that the demands it makes upon its skill and ability are very considerable. Consequently many successful and attractive plays are seen at rare intervals on account of the necessary actors not being available in order to render them full justice.

There are successful plays by the test of time that do not fulfil two of the conditions of my definition ; that is to say they are not either sympathetic or well-constructed, but they are so few that they scarcely need consideration.

There are also sympathetic plays, in which character and dialogue are the sole elements of attraction and that are undoubtedly successful. Their construction is faulty in spite of considerable ingenuity in what are called "situations." The late Mr. James Albery's delightful play of "Two Roses" may be cited as a case in point. As also some of T. W. Robertson's charming comedies, of which I shall have occasion to speak in detail. The defect may arise from deficiency of "story," a totally different thing to "plot" ; or the want of the necessary skill in interweaving "story" and "plot."

It may be thought that the definition given is too exacting, and that there are many sympathetic and well-built pieces that act effectively and serve their purpose without any thought of further revival. This

is perfectly true, but it is by considering the "survival of the fittest" that it is possible to take into account the strength or weakness of a drama, and try to arrive at a solution of the problem before us. It will also be a guide to what is attractive on the stage, and throw some light on those elements which enable a play to acquire more than a temporary popularity.

With regard to the myriads of pieces produced called farcical comedies, whose aim and object are to amuse and nothing more, it must be remarked that the skill required to produce them must by no means be despised; many of the qualities that they call for are to be found in work of the highest class, that is, in pure comedy; or in comedy drama, a style of piece where the treatment is in the vein of comedy, but which has an underlying serious interest. Notwithstanding that they make a great demand upon technical skill, farces, whether in one act or three, are not to be compared with comedy or comedy drama, for difficulty of construction. In a farcical play it constantly happens that the characters are impossible, their motives and actions unnatural, and that probability is violated at every turn. All this is quite consistent with their being heartily and wholesomely amusing, and capable of drawing a great deal of money into the treasury of the theatre. Such pieces vary much, both in their treatment and quality. They may be illumined with an airy grotesqueness, or a graceful humour approaching the brilliance of high comedy, and calculated to delight a cultured audience; or they may descend to the veriest practical buffoonery or display of "comic business," as it is called. Like other branches of art, they are

amenable to, if not governed by, the laws of taste. They require more than any other products of the dramatist the co-operation of the audience—and make good Rosalind's truism,—

> "A jest's prosperity lies in the ear
> Of him that hears it; never in the tongue
> Of him that makes it."

The three-act "farcical comedies" that have been so much in vogue of late years take the place of the old-fashioned one or two-act farces of days gone by. Still, it is no mean task to rationally supply your fellow-creature with food for mirth, and work worthy enough for those whose abilities call them to it. Broad farce, free from coarseness in the making and the interpretation, is one of the most enjoyable things the stage can yield. This branch of the theatrical art has sometimes proved very remunerative. A great deal of it is quite outside what can be called by any stretch the literature of the stage, and holds much the same position to the drama as the "shilling shocker" does to literature.

How is it then that other than poor plays, with a higher ambition than merely to amuse, and which certainly do not come within the range of my definition, manage to attain a great success for a time? It is due to various reasons. It may be owing to the public, which, as I have intimated, is heedless enough as a body, so that it be fairly entertained. Or to the skill of the actors and stage management, or, to return to my first-mentioned side issue, it may be due to the effect of some passing folly or "fad" which a manager is too glad to take advantage of. Other reasons could be

given, but it is to the interpreters undoubtedly that the highest credit must be yielded. The art of acting often covers even the most serious constructive defects of a play; subduing the colour here, heightening it there, and adding innumerable touches everywhere, for which an author has reason to be profoundly grateful. The same play revived with a less talented company, or under bad stage management, will make a woful exposure of the play-wright's want of cunning in his craft.

There are two questions the interest of which is perennial: "Is it possible to know beforehand whether a play will act well?" and "can one know whether a play will prove attractive?" These are not easy queries to give a direct answer to. Let us take the first. When it is asked if a play will act well, we suppose the meaning is: will it be effective when acted? It is quite possible to know; but it is only probable that someone will be able to give the necessary information whose instincts, not sympathies only, are unmistakably dramatic. These will enable their possessor, either by study of stage requirements, or association with the stage as author, manager, or actor, to become qualified for the task. Many of the great writers whose work we have surveyed were of course capable of knowing such a thing, and did know it, but for all useful or practical purposes it was only a partial knowledge. Many dramas that have been produced were effective, and would be grandly so on the stage, if they were acted by a company every member of which was a Roscius. Authors have been so often blind to the rarity of the greatest histrionic gifts, and the immense difficulty in its higher manifestations of the art of acting. I am

writing of things as they are, not as many would wish them to be. The laws of the higher form of the drama differ greatly from what may be said to govern such work as we are now considering. Only a perfect knowledge of the capacities of the artistes who are to interpret the work is likely to enable an author to know how far it will prove effective. This knowledge from various causes now due to the changed conditions of the stage, he is scarcely likely to be full master of.

With regard to the second question, whether a play will prove attractive, the answer must also be burdened with various contingencies which must be first considered. It is quite possible to form an estimate, and a fair one, as to the likelihood of success, but such an estimate can be given only by an expert, and the most skilful judge is liable to err at times.

One often hears it said of an untried play that "it is a mere chance," or that "no one can tell." Of a certain class of ephemeral pieces this may be in a measure true. But, with fair opportunities given for judging, to declare that no estimate can be formed, is erroneous, and a distinct confession that experience is without value. Fair opportunities of judging may be exceedingly rare and difficult to supply ; that is another matter, but a really good play, like a good story, or a good picture, is most certainly capable of being judged, and will often outlast temporary opinions and tastes. Good and sound work is always good and sound ; and its merit is by the cultured critic clearly recognized. The degree of success a play may achieve, or rather the length of its run, is difficult to predict. And this it must be allowed is what the manager is anxious to arrive at.

Macready, who was a practical man, and a manager and actor, was opposed to the views here given. With rhetorical decisiveness, he says, "From the many opportunities subsequently offered me of testing the fallibility of opinion in these cases, the conclusion has been forced upon me that the most experienced judges cannot with certainty predict the effect in representation of plays which they may hear read, or even see rehearsed. Some latent weakness, some deficient link in the chain of interest, imperceptible till in actual presence, will oftentimes balk hopes apparently based on the firmest principles, and baffle judgments respected as oracular."

Hearing a play read, or seeing it rehearsed in the manner that was, in Macready's time, unavoidable—very long runs being unknown—cannot be accepted as a fair opportunity. With play-writers of established reputation, nine times out of ten, a manager has not the play submitted to him in any complete form. The last act of "Pizarro," which Sheridan adapted, was, it is said, unfinished on the very night of its first representation. Two days before the "Critic" was announced, it was not in any complete state in the actors' hands. The story is, that, at a night rehearsal, Sheridan was decoyed to the theatre, and induced by King, the stage-manager, to go into the small green-room, where there was a cosy fire burning, and near it a comfortable arm-chair; on the table there were pens, ink and paper, with two bottles of claret, and a tempting dish of anchovy sandwiches. Sheridan had no sooner entered the room than King popped out and locked the door. His father-in-law, Thomas Linley, and Dr. Ford, were the managers,

and they informed him from outside, that he was to finish the wine and the burlesque, and not to come out till he had done so. Sheridan enjoyed the joke heartily, set to work in earnest and the play was completed.

Modern versions of similar experiences could be adduced.

That apart from such embarrassments, a manager, with the responsibilities and duties attendant on his position, should find it difficult to decide, is not to be wondered at.

One of the most popular plays of its day—Home's "Douglas"—is said to have been rejected by Garrick, and the "Fatal Discovery," by the same author, which utterly failed, had his enthusiastic commendation. Certainly, when managers do make such mistakes, "the crime carries its punishment along with it." Nor as a rule are actors good judges. The actor's art is a self-absorbing one, and he is too much engrossed with his own "part" to fairly gauge the effect of the whole. With the necessary requirements of costume and its changing, etc., it is difficult at final rehearsals to become a spectator. Besides which, he has the artist's temperament, and his sanguine nature turns from any contemplation of failure. He is loyal to his "management," and should misgivings arise he makes a brave fight for it, and endeavours to conceal them. I do not think that many experts even are capable of judging of the merits of a play by a single reading of it by its author, who very often mars his verses "with reading them ill-favouredly." The old system of the author reading the full play once only to the actors and actresses engaged in it, is not to be commended. There are reasons

advanced for this custom which need not be entered into here. Much tact and good temper are necessary with a body of actors on the production of a new and important play. As a matter of fact, after the reading, the full text of the play is rarely in the possession of even the principal actors and actresses. Each of them is provided with his or her "part," and they are therefore unable to judge whether the play, as a whole, is good, and whether their fellow-artistes are likely to do full justice to the material with which they are supplied. An intelligent actor or actress ought, I think, to know something of the merits of a play; but there are not too many capable of giving a judgment of a work from the point of construction, which is a special study. Like artistes in other branches, they have their likes and dislikes, their passions, prejudices, sympathies and antipathies—they would not be actors if they had not—and the difficulty is to get from the scales that they hold, the indication of an opinion free from the suspicion that kindly feeling is taking down the balance against their better judgment. That gifted and charming actress, Mrs. Kendal, has, in her "Dramatic Opinions," confessed that she is "not personally a good judge of a play," but it is difficult to think that here she is not taking for conviction what may be due to mistrust. She follows it up by describing an instance in which her judgment was once at fault. But it is the exception which proves the rule, and, let me repeat, *errare humanum est.* Similar mistakes occur constantly in music, painting, literature and every other avocation. Here is a well-known story in literature which could be easily paralleled in connection with the stage. Many

years ago a young fellow, twenty-five or twenty-six years old, submitted the MS. of a novel to Mr. Colburn the publisher, who placed it in the hands of his chief "reader," by whom it was declared to be utterly worthless. He gave it to his second "reader," who reported more favourably. This induced him to read it himself, with this verdict as a result: "It is my decided opinion that it will be the book of the year!" And it was, I believe. "Pelham" was the name of the novel, and the author of it was Bulwer, afterwards Lord Lytton. But if the manager be not an actor, or not engaged in the play in question, it may seem that a full "dress rehearsal" of the piece would enable him to predict what its fate would be. It sometimes does so, but as all his preparations are complete, and his outlay made, it is too late to withdraw it, supposing that such a course is open to him—for the author invariably believes in the strength and beauty of his bantling. It must be said that great allowance should be made for the difficulties of the actor at a "première," for at many a last "dress rehearsal" the advantages are gathered entirely by the scenic artist and the carpenters. The actors, who with scenes and costumes supplied, most require to reap the benefit of it, have to do as they can. Many of the best artistes, with all the will in the world, are quite unable to act scenes of any power or passion at rehearsal as they can "at night." It is a matter of temperament or idiosyncrasy. Where it is possible, it is a distinct gain to the actor, whose art, like the musician's, and, in fact, every other, requires incessant practice to arrive at anything like perfection.

In the case of plays that are essentially farcical, the

audience is such an important factor in the success of a production that nothing but its full presence at the first performance enables a judgment to be arrived at. What can be gathered from the foregoing, then, seems to be that the success of a play is only to be foretold by an expert; but that fair opportunities are so rarely given of forming an estimate, that no result at all approaching certainty can be arrived at. The expert would not stultify himself by saying, "Yes, here is a good play, and, well acted, it will draw money." To be safe, he would put it in this way, "Here is a play, that under certain conditions, that is, of theatre, acting, scenery, etc., will attract, but to what extent, that is, how long a run it will have, it is impossible to predict." Another judgment may be to the effect that "the play with certain radical or structural alterations would succeed, but in its present form it is hopeless," or that "no alteration can possibly render it acceptable." The difficulty of forming an opinion on pieces is not always of the same degree. A play, the main attraction of which is its character or dialogue, is more easily judged than one whose chief merit is attributable to the ingenuity with which it is pieced together. Pure comedy may be regarded as an exception to this.

Another question which, if of a less practical value than the two already discussed, is not inferior to them in interest, is "Why do plays that give such a keen enjoyment in the acting fail to impress in the reading?" The explanation given in the first case supplies an answer in a partial way, namely, that the reader is not an expert by reason of a deficiency in that quality not easy to analyze or define and which may be called "the

dramatic sense." Sir Walter Scott writes (he is dealing with romantic drama), "We certainly do not always read with the greatest pleasure those plays which act best." But the great wizard knew the limits of his cunning, and what disqualified him from forming an opinion; for elsewhere he says, "I feel severely the want of knowledge of theatrical business and effect"; and again—"I hold myself inadequate to estimate those criticisms which rest on stage effect." Dr. Johnson, who had not the modesty of Sir Walter (speaking of "High Life Below Stairs," a less difficult class of play) says, "Here is a farce which is really very diverting, when you see it acted; and yet one may read it, and not know that one has been reading anything at all." It is never safe to quote Johnson as a critic of things theatrical, but he must have been very obtuse, or very bilious, not to be able to see "where the fun comes in" of Townley's play. It is full of opportunities for broadly comic actors. The plan of it is as follows:—A very wealthy young fellow is warned by a friend that he is being ruined by the shameful extravagance of his servants. He is no sooner convinced of this than he pretends to have gone on a journey. By the aid of his friend's servant he manages to get introduced into his own servants' hall as a yokel from the agricultural districts. Flunkeys, lady's-maids, house-maids, coachmen, etc., etc., ape the manners of their superiors in station and riot in the wildest spirit, giving scope to every sort of burlesque of absurd follies. All this is watched with astonished amusement by the master, who ends the matter by disclosing himself and turning them all out of doors.

Now it is certainly strange that given such a "motif" Johnson should not have been able to see the drollery of the situations arising, or should have looked for something in the book which was naturally enough supplied by the actors.

In saying "naturally enough" I am leading to a solution of the difficulty, and supplying a clue to one of the secrets of the actor's art. A play is not only valuable for the words it contains, but for the opportunity it yields its interpreters of endowing it with what may be of as much, or of more importance than what can be derived from verbal expression. Every drama is enriched by its capacity to receive suggestions that are known to the actors as "business." It is the unwritten action, the something between the lines, which goes to explain the reason, that, except to any one with dramatic instinct, a play is so difficult to appraise. What is done is more important than what is said. If in imagination we take from some attractive play we have witnessed everything but the mere words, we shall at once become conscious of what is lost. The latter can be dispensed with—not so the action. Those who have seen the admirable art displayed in "L'Enfant Prodigue" will perhaps comprehend this more fully. It is surprising that a play upon such simple lines as "High Life Below Stairs," and with such opportunities for practical caricature and fun, should *after it had been seen*, fail to supply Doctor Johnson with the cause of his delight. One is apt to wonder what, on reading it, he expected to find in the way of literature. A play that has not been represented, demands in perusal, for the comprehension of its stage effect, an alertness of intellect that the average reader,

who is not gifted with dramatic instinct, rarely brings to it.

Plays are not generally read now, as they used to be. Intellectual aids and recreations of every sort have taken their place. Authors occasionally print a volume of plays, and some of them are to be had singly, but it is generally after the first gloss is worn off in the theatre.[1] Johnson and Goldsmith made money out of the copyright of "Irene" and "The Good-Natured Man," neither of them lasting and successful plays; but their authors' names were great in literature.

If a writer of any eminence attain thorough success with a play, his emoluments from the theatre will make any literary copyright a very secondary consideration. Should failure be the result of his efforts, the less said the better. "In other compositions" to quote Sir Walter again, "the neglect of the world takes nothing from the merit of the author; but there is something ludicrous in being *affiché* as the author of an unsuccessful play."

Is it to be wondered at that sometimes an author smarting under failure should decline to take with calmness the adverse decision of the public with regard to his work, and decide to "print it and shame the fools?" We have seen the risks and disappointments to which he is liable; and there may be some justification for his conduct, for many a play that has failed, contains some of the best material its author has been capable of producing. Amusing scenes, brilliant dialogue and skil-

[1] Since writing the above the author finds it necessary to modify this statement. The American Copyright Act seems to have stimulated the publishing of plays.

fully drawn characters are often irretrievably lost if a play fail to attract.

Let us look at the means ordinarily employed by the manager to cater for the public. His usual course, very naturally, is to apply to some dramatist who has already been successful. Such a plan commends itself to him for various reasons. The chances of a novice being able to supply him with a play that will serve his purpose are, as he knows, about a thousand to one. Better than most men, perhaps, he is aware of the value of a name. The multitude is apt to believe that what has pleased it before will please it again, and that a new play by A, B, or C, as the case may be, will have good points. In short, it concludes rightly enough in things theatrical, as in other matters, that if a reputation has been honestly gained, it is a certain sign of some sort of merit, pretenders and quacks as a rule having but a brief existence. The manager's first anxiety, as we have seen, is to fill his treasury. It is not to be supposed that he believes in every play that he produces being able to do this; but unless he is driven to extremities—and such a state of affairs has been known—he has a conviction that the piece he decides to put upon his stage is worth trying, being quite alive to the rarity of good dramatic work, and the necessity, now-a-days, of submitting to a considerable risk. The system of trying plays first at a matinée is sometimes of value to him; but the present custom of engaging actors, which is in two senses that of "piece-work," renders this of some difficulty. Careful and finished rehearsals are not easy to insure. The particular actors or actresses requisite for his venture will not always be available. And even

when he guarantees an actor a certain run, or a certain remuneration, whatever the result of his experiment, the risk to the latter, unless there should be something specially valuable in the part he plays, is also great. The author, it is true, if he can afford it, is free to engage a theatre and a company of actors for a matinée performance, and produce his play himself. But if a manager finds such a course beset with difficulties, how much more so will the novice who understands little or nothing of the routine and machinery of the stage? Experience he will get for his expenditure, and it will be fortunate for him, if he has not to pay too dearly for this jewel. There are other matters in connection with matinées that do not apply to evening performances, the audience is not made up of the real play-going section, nor is there found in it the full complement of professed critics. Add to this the want of judgment often displayed by the friends of the author and the actor, and it will be seen that such a test is not without its dangers. Again, though an expert may know what good acting will do for a piece, the author and his friends may not, and should his play fail to please, it unfortunately receives a condemnation due sometimes only to its treatment. Managers, as a rule, are busy men, and try to do too much; but they would be more than foolish if not more than mortal, to visit all the matinées of new plays. They have not the time even if they have the inclination to see how any drama submitted to them could, by all sorts of alterations, be rendered a sound and effective piece of stage-craft. It is not their work to do the author's, though it is a labour they take upon themselves occasionally. They sometimes, as

we have shown, in the case of that imaginary young author, give him suggestions of such a radical nature from a constructive point of view, as to obtain for a perfectly impracticable play a great and permanent success.

Notwithstanding all this, there are many successful plays that have been first given to the public at a matinée performance. It is doubtful also whether, in the not too likely event of a really fine play being presented under such circumstances, it could be altogether lost, even with bad and unsuitable acting. But really fine plays being the exception always, we need not take them into account. If the chances of an outsider or novice are so slight, it may be asked what hope there can be for the aspirant for stage honours. Why give that phantom sketch of the young play-wright and his good fortune? I spoke of an exception—a case possible but not probable. Writing for the theatre successfully is only accomplished, as a rule, by the closest application, and the most practical study, and is a very arduous and exacting form of literary labour and mental exercise. Our successful dramatic authors have only become so by dint of patience and perseverance. The interesting details given by my old and esteemed managers, Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft, in their popular book, of T. W. Robertson and his hard fight, point to one of many similar instances. If, in the first flush of aspiration begot of the effect produced on them by some past master of his art, youthful writers have been tempted to try their hands at a five-act comedy, it is fortunate for them if they have discovered their mistake early, and set to work on something less ambitious.

But to do this with any reasonable hopes of success, they will probably find it desirable first to learn, among other matters, something of the qualities required in a good play-wright.

CHAPTER III.

QUALITIES REQUIRED TO WRITE A PLAY.

FOR one person who can put together some sort of a play I suppose there are a hundred who can produce some sort of a novel; and yet we constantly hear such remarks as, "What a drama Blank, the novelist, could write!" "What a shame it is that Dash does not do a fine play!" or "What splendid work Star might give to the stage; he's got it in him!" That is the point, but how is it to come out? We have among us novelists who can sit down on the instant, and write away for dear life and public delight, scarcely pausing till their work is complete. They are able to tell a good story well, give it truthful and effective characters, strengthen it with powerful and touching scenes, put into it all that is attractive and amusing, endow it with beauties of style, contriving, at the same time, that the work shall have a beginning, middle and *dénouement*, and prove admirable in form and construction; yet, unaided, they could no more give to the world a successful play, than they could fly. Such writers may not be plentiful, but they exist.

Macready said, and Sheridan Knowles seems to have agreed with him, that if Sir Walter Scott could have written a successful or stirring play, it must have come

out of him. In other words, had he been endowed with the true dramatic fire, he could not have suppressed it. But there was a requirement that the actor and the dramatist temporarily lost sight of in their discussion. True dramatic fire, it will not be denied, was one of Scott's best gifts. Strong drama and high-class melodrama he could have given to the stage if he had chosen, or been compelled to do so. Why should he face the difficulties of the dramatist's art, when the weaving of romances was, as Mr. Louis Stevenson remarks, "play to him"? There was a strong necessity to write dramas or anything else, after the Ballantyne crash, but Scott was then fifty-five years old, which, with a broken spirit, I fear must be looked upon as "too late a week" to master the technique of play-making. We have seen that he knew and realized the difficulties of the dramatic art. That he might have succeeded in writing for the stage is a view also held by his son-in-law and biographer, Lockhart, who says that what he did in this way was quite "unworthy of him. He threw off these things *currente calamo*."

It is clear from Sir Walter Scott's expressed opinion of the audiences of his day, that he had no strong inducement to risk failure by any serious attempt. Macready and Knowles had forgotten for the moment, what of course they well knew, that the difficulty of writing for the stage is in acquiring a mastery of the form—in understanding the technical shape and requirements. This is an intellectual task that is specially exacting in comedy. Nobler gifts may be necessary for the poetic drama, but the difficulty of form in pure comedy is much harder to surmount. As, if I remember

rightly, one of our most skilful and experienced critics, Mr. Joseph Knight, puts it, "Comedy is an exacting mistress, and unless you accede to all she requires, spurns your offer, and turns you into ridicule." Form admits of gradations, and I think for our purposes some such formula as this might be accepted :—

1. *It is difficult to write a drama at all.*
2. *It is a harder task to write a successful drama.*
3. *It is even more difficult to write a successful comedy drama.*
4. *To write a successful comedy is a yet greater feat.*
5. *To write a great and popular comedy is a work of Genius.*

Having assumed the possession of imaginative power and "the dramatic sense" of which I have spoken, let us inquire what other qualities are necessary for a good and successful play-wright.

The first essential is *Invention.* Even allowing that an author is not blessed with the gift of adding to the world's store original ideas, this quality cannot be dispensed with. It is said that Englishmen are deficient in the power of invention, but is this a fair conclusion? The ethics of the French stage, from which we have always been liberally supplied, give scope for greater complications and ingenuities. The main reason, I take it, that such a charge as the lack of invention is brought against English writers, is of a practical nature. Many men whose gifts might lead them to compete, are quick enough to see the speculative conditions of the attempt. Managers pay for the result, and not the effort. So far so good. A play that proves largely successful and draws much money, should be

paid for accordingly. But to try to write a good play, is, as I have stated, a more exacting labour, both with regard to time and capacity, than is required in other branches of literature. Liberal sums are paid to those authors who have won their spurs. They receive remuneration for their names as well as for their work. A name attracts and is worth so much money, but I think that the elements of speculation should be minimized. Now and then will arise an author who is capable of producing an immensity of work for the stage, much of it of the poorest and most inartistic kind. Such a thing is inevitable. Quality suffers for quantity. Play-making may not be one of the exact sciences, but it is more nearly allied to them than appears at first sight. It can fairly be described as a sort of *sympathy in mathematics,* and requires no mean intellectual powers to pursue with success. Head must be associated with heart, and constructive ability with sympathetic expression. To say that Englishmen who have won the highest honours in every branch of science, lack the ability, I hold to be unjust and futile. I have little doubt, too, that with increased encouragement an art would be popularized in England that has never been greatly in favour, I mean collaboration. The French understand its value better than we do. If it were more common with us, the labours of manager and stage manager would be greatly lightened. In France and elsewhere, the collaboration of two authors in one-act plays is very usual ; and in longer and more ambitious pieces the conjunction of three, and even four writers, is brought about. It would be necessary, in paying a higher rate for stage efforts, that a manager should have

some regard to the requisite capacity in the writer; but it is probable in this respect he would be quite able to look after his own interests. A clever novelist in making a dramatic effort not only sacrifices a large amount of time that can be employed with pecuniary profit, but is apt to find that stage work induces a certain "unsettlement," if I may coin a word, that is somewhat detrimental to his ordinary labours. He has a difficulty too, to cope with, that does not fall to the lot of the younger aspirants. In seeking the means of obtaining dramatic honours and rewards he will find it necessary, as Lord Lytton said, to "unlearn as well as to learn." Equal eminence in both departments is uncommon.

The principal writers who have obtained any considerable success in the two capacities will not make a very formidable array. Omitting the great name of Fielding, whom we have considered, the mention of Goldsmith, Holcroft, Mrs. Inchbald, Lover, Mrs. Gore, Douglas Jerrold, Bulwer, Charles Reade, Shirley Brooks and Wilkie Collins, will include most of those who have done so. Bulwer furnishes the most triumphant instance known. For this success he was very much indebted to Macready. His plays of "Cromwell," and "The Duchess de La Vallière," which were not successful efforts, preceded "The Lady of Lyons." The first, I believe, was never acted, but it may be presumed to have given its author experience in play-making. From these failures he learnt perhaps as much as from Macready's personal advice. But even if a writer be gifted with that intellectual activity which, like necessity, is the mother of invention, it will be of slight avail unless

its child is trained and disciplined. This discipline is best gained, as I have before stated, by association, in some form, with the boards of a theatre. An occasional visit is of little use. Nor is the most careful study of all the plays that are temporarily successful of value, except sometimes as an indication of what to avoid. Conventionalism governs all matters in connection with the stage more than is generally believed. How difficult it is for writers to realize this, is proved by the ideas sometimes entertained as to what will dramatize in literature. I believe there are people sanguine enough to think they could make a play out of Plato's "Republic," White's "History of Selborne," or Smith's "Wealth of Nations." The most extraordinary things are attempted.

The desire to escape the labour of original invention is, I suppose, one of the reasons that popular novels are turned into plays. A second, may be that a favourite novel in the form of a play will in a measure advertise and recommend itself. I share a common prejudice, and must confess to a distaste for seeing favourite novels dramatized. The arts of the dramatist and the novelist, as we see, are distinct, and the pleasure that is derived from them comes in a totally different way. Though there are many instances in which well-known stories have succeeded as plays, the result artistically, as a rule is not happy. With all the skill and art possible, the stage in many cases is apt to vulgarize and treat too materially a fine conception. The elements of melodrama in a story will, it may be granted, be heightened in effect, but what treatment can augment

the finest traits in "Jane Eyre" or "Adam Bede," or "The Christmas Carol"? There are occasions when an author lays down the lines of his story in such a manner as to render it capable of being easily made into a play; or, as is more often the case, he will make a play first, and develop his story from it afterwards. Charles Reade and Wilkie Collins both adopted this plan with success, but, as will be rightly inferred, it asks for a greater tax on the inventive and constructive powers. "Christie Johnstone," by the former author, was arranged first as a play, I believe. It seems to me still—allowing for a deal of irrelevant matter that is now out of date, if attractive at any time—one oft he most beautiful and dramatic stories ever written. I do not find it easy to read it without a quickened pulse, and a ready response to its touches of humanity. One of its finest scenes is that in which the heroine Christie, the Newhaven fish-wife, sets sail on the Firth of Forth to save a young artist, who, while bathing, has been carried away by the tide and in danger of losing his life. The motives that prompt her to the rescue are purely human. She effects her purpose, but is not aware that the man she rescues is her own temporarily estranged lover. The treatment of the incident is praiseworthy in the extreme, but unsuited, except in a mutilated form, for presenting on the boards of a theatre. On the other hand it contains scenes that would act admirably.

It may happen that the greatest exercise of the inventive power will, with dramatist, poet or novelist, result in some story or situation that has long been common property. Lord Tennyson himself told me that since the publication of "Enoch Arden" he had received

from various sources five or six accounts of returned mariners who found themselves in the plight of the hero of his beautiful poem. There is interest and amusement in speculating how any given "motif" was evolved by the dramatist, but it is questionable if it be of much real usefulness. In a well-known paper of Poe's he professes to trace the development of "The Raven" from its inception to the finished state. Now, although Mr. Lowell's estimate is worth remembering—

> "There comes Poe with his Raven, like Barnaby Rudge,
> Three-fifths of him genius, and two-fifths sheer fudge"—

"The Philosophy of Composition" must always be of interest to any poet, in its original sense of maker, and therefore of interest to the dramatist or play-wright.

What is said of the expediency of a plot being "elaborated to its *dénouement*" is decidedly worthy the attention of the aspiring dramatist. The author who has not, at a very early stage, a serious regard for the end of his play, whether it be in one act or five, will probably find himself in a difficulty. An amusing example of this is given in "Macready's Reminiscences." Barry Cornwall (Procter) projected a play already spoken of, called "Mirandola," but he began it with the second act. Macready liked the look of what was done, and urged him to complete the drama. The author then supplied a first act. He had settled his *dénouement* or catastrophe for the end of act five, but was in a difficulty as to filling up the third and fourth acts, and the beginning of the fifth. In despair he begged Macready to help him out of the hobble. He consented, and did his best by designing some scenes

to fill up the gap, but was quite aware the attempt was a sorry business. They then consulted Sheil, the dramatist, who acknowledged the perplexity, but could devise no way out of it. Procter therefore went to work to get free of the dilemma as he could, re-writing and shaping the scenes till something was arrived at. All's well that ends well. The drama was, as we have seen, highly successful; for nine nights it was acted to "overflowing houses," and would, but for the counter-attraction of Miss Wilson (whom George the Fourth had praised) at the rival theatre, have had a more continuous prosperity.

Whatever additional embroidery the skill or suggestion of the actors or the stage-manager may be able to give to the fabric, it is desirable that it should be fairly well knit first. The endings of plays have so frequently endangered their success, that a phrase, "that fatal last act," has become a too familiar one. The greatest care and thought should be given to the last and penultimate acts of a play. The interest should rise as the drama progresses. Let us suppose that it is a four-act play—dramas in four acts being mostly in demand. Roughly speaking, and nine times out of ten, the first act takes care of itself. If it should happen in these heavy dining days, as, alas, it was in Shakespeare's time, that some among the audience who come to "see away their shilling," do so in order

> "To take their ease,
> And sleep an act or two,"

it is fair to assume that the later acts will be selected for their repose. At any rate, it is to be hoped that the

majority of the audience comes fresh, in its best signification. The second act should be stronger than the first, and the third will probably be the test of the real vitality of the work. Should the fourth or fifth act be stronger than the third so much the better, but the third act is the crucial test in most cases. In some of our greatest five-act plays, as in "The Merchant of Venice" and "The School for Scandal," the finest effect or the most telling "situation" comes at the end of the fourth.

It has been asserted that any novelist, by setting to work and doing what Lord Lytton did in the way of unlearning, could attain success as a dramatist. But this hypothesis rests on a poor foundation. There are hundreds of clever and competent story writers who are utterly deficient in "dramatic sense." This quality Bulwer, the progenitor of the sensation novel, had in a very high degree. There is, too, in his work a distinct fibre of poetry and noble aspiration, associated with a certain element of the superficial, which is favourable to much that is successful in the theatre. How far it was derived from a study of French literature and French dramatists it is not easy to say ; but it is to be found in all his plays, and notably in his three greatest successes in the theatre : "The Lady of Lyons," "Richelieu," and "Money." Rhetoric in plays that are to attract the multitude has always been in the theatre, with rare exceptions, of higher value than real poetry. Its rendering is also easier. There are in Bulwer's stories and romances, dozens of characters or types which would always have remarkable effect in the acting. Some of them which figure in his plays will be found

often repeated in his novels. But the wit and brilliance of this many-sided genius have never been questioned. Some lines which appeared in a leader in the *Daily News*, after his death, seem to me very just, and give a key to much of his success in the theatre: "Where Lord Lytton really excelled, was in the delineation of cold, cynical, cultured natures, brought under the sway of great passions or confronted by great events; in the analytical exhibition of character as modified by the complexities of a highly artificial state of society; and in the subtle suggestion of a mysterious background of beauty, awfulness, and terror, lying behind the puppet shows of life."

Lord Lytton, too, spared no pains, and was never afraid of work. Nor does it seem that in fitting it for the stage he was unreasonable when that surgical trial to authors, termed "cutting," was essential. He learnt at an early period what Pope has called "the last and greatest art, the art to blot." Above all, it must never be forgotten that he was exceptionally fortunate in having for a colleague and interpreter, Macready. We may remember that Mr. Yellowplush was rather hard on the "Honrabble Barnet," as he called Bulwer, but the attack was not altogether undeserved. It would take too much space to consider the question of "Adaptation" fully, but it may not be amiss to see how far invention is necessary for the adapter. When Mr. Vincent Crummles announced to his company a new piece, the name of which was not known, but would supply everybody with a good "part," Nicholas Nickleby was, as the author, rather startled with the suddenness of the proclamation, and pleaded that his

"invention was not accustomed to these demands." The manager could not see the force of his objection, and asked him if he understood French. On Nicholas's rejoinder of "Perfectly well," Mr. Crummles took from his table drawer a manuscript, told him to turn it into English, and put his (Nicholas's) name on the title-page. In far grander temples than those in which the Portsmouth manager held sway, such conduct was very usual, if it did not obtain in a much more recent period than that of "Nicholas Nickleby." Whether it was regarded as being justified by supposed mightier precedents cannot be determined. The literary gentleman, in the same amusing work, gave it as his opinion that "Bill was an adapter; and very well he adapted too, considering." Shakespeare's miraculous transmutation cannot of course be seriously considered as adaptation. The highest inventive genius is shown in much of his work where he seems to have utilized chronicles, legends, ballads, stories, and incidents most fully. The late Mr. Dutton Cook has given in his very entertaining work, called "On the Stage," a long list of the names of English writers, who laid under contribution the best things in Molière. Soon after his death, his plays were not only published in English, but with the English and French side by side, which was a very convenient arrangement for those would-be play-wrights ignorant of the Gallic tongue. Dryden, Betterton, Shadwell, Wycherley, Otway, Sir John Vanbrugh, Colley Cibber, Mrs. Centlivre, Fielding, Murphy, Bickerstaff, and others were indebted to the great French dramatist. Cibber's impudence, who took credit in "The Non-Juror" for originality, and his assurance in his

preface to the King, in talking of "his concern in the interests of truth and loyalty," are refreshing. It brought forth the following satire. It is from the epilogue to "Sir Walter Raleigh," a contemporary tragedy,—

> "Yet to write plays is easy, faith, enough,
> As you have seen by Cibber in Tartuffe.
> With how much wit he did your hearts engage;
> He only stole the play; he writ the title page."

In justice to our own eighteenth-century authors it should be remembered that—as Mr. Dutton Cook points out—we were duly robbed in turn. Ducis adapted Shakespeare for the Théâtre Français. The plays of Congreve, Farquhar, Lillo, Thomson, Edward Moore, and Sheridan were all "done" into French, and also the novels of Richardson and Fielding. It is amusing to read that when "The School for Scandal" was translated by M. Pluteau, under the title of "L'Homme Sentimental," the comedy was found unsuitable on the ground of morality, or want of it. The conduct of Lady Teazle was "too scandalous for representation."

The amount of credit due to an adapter for his invention must depend largely on the nature of his work. Charles Reade, in a characteristic jeremiad against adapters, says: "This is the pipe of vanity and ignorance; they have never invented, or they would know the difference. Now, I have done both. I have adapted French pieces with invariable success, and I have invented. I am, therefore, a better authority; and I pledge you my honour, that to invent good pieces is very hard, and to adapt them is quite as easy as shelling peas. . . . I can lay my

hand on a dozen adapters of French pieces to the English stage, who know neither French nor English nor the stage." The author of "The Cloister and the Hearth" was skilled in hyperbole. There is a matter connected with this subject that is worth some attention, which managers are responsible for. To read in the *Times* advertisements that a version of some French classic is by an Englishman, without the slightest allusion being made to the original author, shows not only a want of taste, but a small regard for truth and fairness. It may be argued, "Oh, everybody knows it is So and So's," but that is not the point. There are cultivated and refined Frenchmen who read the *Times*, and the reproach should be removed. There is, I hope, in the majority of cases a sense of chivalrous fairness in all dealings with our courtly neighbours. It would take more space than is at my disposal, to explain the many forms in which the invention is taxed in the art of play construction. Invention will be greatly put to the test in disentangling the threads of a plot and story, as well as in creating the complication, though the latter is not such a light task as may be assumed.

"Nothing so easy as intricate confusion of plot and rant. Mrs. Centlivre in comedy has ten times the bustle of Congreve; but are they to be compared? And yet she drove Congreve from the theatre."

Thus writes Lord Byron. But he was wrong, or gave utterance to half the truth only. Confusion of plot, and involvement, may or may not have been easy to the author of "Childe Harold," but he would have found, if he had tried, that unravelling the threads of the intricacy, and making everything clear to an audience,

is by no means a slight task—a play is a *lucid* complication or a *clear* involvement. Nor do I think he was right in his last sentence. Congreve may have been jealous of Mrs. Centlivre's success; but there were other reasons (one of which has been given) why Congreve ceased writing for the theatre. In elegance, wit, and construction they were *not* to be compared, though the lady was more than his match in bustle.

The next most important qualification for a playwright I take to be the power of *Characterization*. This, like other requisites, will still tax the invention. In other words, the dramatist must call up from the "vasty deep" of his consciousness a set of characters that shall consistently work out his plot. Whether a plot be first arranged for the characters, or the characters build up and elaborate the plot, is of no great moment, so that the end in view be satisfactorily accomplished. The *modus operandi* will vary considerably. The "proper way" to write a play is to do it successfully. Sometimes a character or characters will suggest a "motif" or pivot, from which will follow a gradual accretion of movement, incident, and situation. Or the "motif" with its supporting scenes and situations may ask for characters to carry them out. We shall have afterwards, to consider the "pump-and-tub" plan, which likewise did not become altogether obsolete after the disappearance of Mr. Vincent Crummles. In a modified and varied form it still obtains.

Some years ago a London evening journal published a series of short papers by popular dramatic authors, who gave details of their mode of working. They were full of ingenuity and very entertaining, but it is an open

question to what extent they proved of value to the budding play-wright. A play, as I have said, being a "growth" and more absolutely so than any other form of literary work, does not easily allow of an analysis by its maker. The importance of keeping steadily in view the fact, that only by gradual development, a play can become an artistic whole, will be seen when it is shown that if an author be incapable of giving reality or *vraisemblance*—conventional or not, as the case may be—to the characters, the plot cannot be consistently carried to its *dénouement*. Characters and movement should act and re-act upon each other. The full-blown genius on whom the whole scheme descends like an atmosphere, or to whom the plan of a play is like the vision of Kubla Khan, suddenly clear, is, I fancy, allied to the great family from which Mrs. Harris derives her being. The lack of ability to see what is, or is not effective, as a character for the stage, is a fault that should be early remedied. There is a necessity also that a writer should be conscious where amongst his characters the interest should centre. Goldsmith's first comedy, "The Good-Natured Man," has in this respect a serious defect, and which will always, I think, stand in the way of its popularity as an acting play. Honeywood (the Good-Natured Man) is not a successful bit of painting ; it is impossible to feel that there is reality or naturalness in the character. As the leading lover, also, Honeywood should exact our sympathy in his misfortunes, instead of which he represses it. When he entertains the idea of giving up the woman he loves to such a creature as Lofty, we are offended with him, but later on, when he actually pleads for his rival to Miss

Richland (she taking it for his own declaration), his conduct provokes disgust. Goldsmith seems to have felt that the character was not satisfactory, if we may judge by the attempts made to justify it, in the speeches at the end of the play given to Sir William Honeywood. As it stands, Croaker (originally played by Shuter) is the best acting part in the piece. Collaboration would not have been easy with Goldsmith, but it might in many respects have improved "The Good-Natured Man."

We now come to *Probability*. This affects incident, movement and characterization. It is evident that what is natural and consistent in a novel is not necessarily so on the stage, where sight takes the place of imagination. It is impossible to lay down rules as to what extent probability can be invaded. As in fiction, it is greatly modified by treatment. *How* it is handled is everything. In broad farce or farcical comedy, violation of probability is not often resented, if it be aided by boundless good humour and "go." With skilful treatment and clever acting, wonders can be accomplished. Nor would it do to examine some of the most successful pieces under a too powerful lens. A too scrupulous regard for probability in either movement or character would, I fear, stand in the way of any new plays being made at all. We must not forget Puff's reply in that best of all burlesques, "The Critic." It struck Mr. Dangle, that the daughter of the Governor of Tilbury Fort being in love with the son of the Spanish Admiral, verged on the improbable. "To be sure," answers Puff, "but what the plague! a play is not to show occurrences that happen every day, but things just so strange, that though thay never did, they might happen."

It is of the highest importance that the principal "motif" of the play should not be chargeable with improbability, or the cleverest treatment in other respects will fail to vitalize a work.

The writer who looks for success on the stage will do well to make sure, first of all, that the pivot on which his work turns is thoroughly sound. I remember an instance where two young authors had collaborated in a play, which, but for the main motive being impossible, would have had every chance of success. Allowing for this big "but," the construction and knowledge of technique, treatment, and dialogue, in the play were admirable. The best proof that the work was well done and the incidents neatly dove-tailed, was shown when an endeavour was made to strengthen or change the main motive. It was quite impracticable to do with any success, and an easier course to start on a new play. Their postulate had been taken too confidently, and when their finished play was submitted to a variety of judgments the weakness of the central support was at once evident. It was a high price to pay for their experience, for the play had cost much time and labour, but though this piece was never acted, the knowledge gained was of great value to them. Had it been presented, it must inevitably have failed, and the good material of every sort that it contained could not have been further utilized. As it happened, they were able to take out most of the plums and put them into another pudding.

There is a quality now to be considered which may come under the general head of Treatment, but which is so important in a play—particularly in its inceptive state, that the chances of a play's success hinge on it.

It is that of *Harmony*, or symmetry: the necessity for keeping a consistent tone. It belongs distinctly to the composition of a work in its early stages, and is a stumbling-block to the most experienced writers for the stage. It is one of the greatest difficulties, as will be inferred, of the class of piece I have called comedy-drama. Though in a measure harmony is necessary in every work, it will be seen that plays of a broadly comic or a distinctly serious tone, do not admit of violent contrasts. In dramatic work, the want of harmony is allied to disparity, or diffuseness of interest. Its dangers are increased by the treatment a play may receive by the actors.

Anything that tends to lighten heavy or sombre plays, is in the theatre of great importance, but on the other hand, it is alarming to an author to see, as a piece grows and develops in the hands of the artistes, his serious and most engrossing interest, quite against his intention, gradually getting swamped and overcome by the humours of the comic or mirthful characterization; for if this be too strongly marked or expressed, the best acting in the serious characters is powerless to hold its own.

Harmony being to some extent an element of taste, it is not easy to submit hard and fast rules for its application.

Mr. Puff got over the difficulties of harmony from a constructive point of view, in a way that can hardly be recommended. He believed always in two plots. "The grand point in managing them is only to let your under-plot have as little connection with your main plot as possible. I flatter myself nothing can be more distinct than mine;

for as in my chief plot the characters are all great people, I have laid my under-plot in low life ; and as the former is to end in deep distress, I make the other end as happy as a farce."

Many plays have been successful that have a total disregard for harmony, but it is questionable whether their success is lasting ; the difficulties being often overcome by the acting and modifications in stage management.

The next most important quality of which we have to treat, is, what may be called (for want of a better expression) *Ethical balance*. It is closely allied to, but not identical with, the moral sense of a work. Here again, treatment of a subject is everything : though I am distinctly in accord with those, who, in the recent controversy over the Norwegian playwright, Ibsen, hold that certain subjects should not be treated on a public stage. The utterance of a great and lofty spirit should never be forgotten. "What delights, what emancipates, not what scares and pains us, is wise and good in speech and in the arts." Fortunately the *morale* of an English audience is sound and healthy. The corrupt are always in a minority. But the theatre deals with effect, not as laid down in written detail, but as it is expressed by the combined treatment of author and actor. It is with plays as with fiction ; it may be extremely difficult to say from any outline to what extent a subject will prove acceptable. Speaking of "Adam Bede" and her publisher, George Eliot says, "I refused to tell my story beforehand on the ground that I would not have it judged apart from my *treatment*, which alone determines the moral quality of art."

The tone of the day in literature will be a general safeguard to the stage. We are happy that we live in times productive of writers whose gifts are grafted on to the healthiest and most bracing natures. The morality of the drama need no longer keep its place in a vexed and doubtful region. The healthy prevailing spirit of the present time, and it is to be hoped of the future, is and will be an assurance, that in spite of errors of taste, the pabulum supplied will be sweet and wholesome.

The preservation of ethical balance is apt to be a difficulty with some authors, and to seriously impede them when greatly gifted in other respects.

There is an attribute in play-writing which, although it would seem simply an initial necessity, is frequently held of too slight account. It is *Condensation*, the antithesis to diffuseness and verbosity, terseness, the power of getting much matter into little space. If it be a requirement in all other writing of our busy and feverish age, how imperatively necessary is it in the acting drama. It might have been given as one of the reasons, for it is an important one, why to some readers there seems to be a want of literary value in successful acting plays. While English audiences are (as it seems they are likely to be) more than those of other countries intolerant of anything that retards action, the art of compression will be an essential to dramatic composition. At the same time there has always been a great deal of wild talk on the subject of "literary plays" and "literature in the drama." As long as theatres remain private speculations in which managers look to be reimbursed for their outlay by audiences made up of all classes, it is useless

to reproach authors for failing to supply what theatre-goers do not require.

It is not easy to conceive how literature, as understood by some of its advocates, is to be reconciled with what Shakespeare calls the "two-hours' traffic" of the stage. Our audiences may be more phlegmatic—which I am inclined to doubt—than those of foreign nations, but they are assuredly more impatient. Incident and movement they demand before all things. More than this, the writer for the English stage who is skilled in his art, will, with the actor's aid, give the effect of literary excellence, without verbiage. In the acting of the higher drama even, much of what comes within the definition of literature has been and is discarded. If we take up a book at home or at the club, that proves dull and bores us, we are free to indulge in the pastime of "skipping." With a play, when the feat is indulged in, it is generally to the exit door of the theatre; a fatal result for the author and everybody else concerned. The increasing impatience of an English audience, and its distaste for anything but rapid action, render compression and brevity more necessary than ever. The acting value of a "part" is not to be estimated by its length. Play-wrights of experience constantly present characters that are wordy and ineffective to the last degree, and it asks exceptional gifts in an actor or actress to conquer the demon of prolixity.

Style can be shown in the briefest forms of expression. It is a requisite, if not a component part of wit, epigram and repartee, but this it will be better to treat of when considering Dialogue.

Before entering into details of the mechanism of a play

there is one other requisite for a successful play-wright that is of the highest value.

It is pre-eminently a gift, and out of the power of any writer to attain who is not blessed with it. It is that of *Sympathy*, heart, humanity; the fellow feeling that makes us "wondrous kind;" the quality that cynics affect to despise, but which they should be grateful to feel is the first to conquer them. Mr. Besant has drawn attention to "sympathy" and its first appearance in the modern novel. Dickens, among others, had previously shown its absence in Defoe. Since his day it has come to be not only an attractive element, but a power, and what is more a necessity in fiction. It would have been strange if, with the growing means of culture and the extension of right feeling, it had not taken its place in the acting drama. The finest acting will conceal its absence in a play, but can never be a substitute for it. Without its presence the most perfect construction and the wittiest dialogue conveyed in the highest style are of little avail for any time. If you would see the triumph of head over heart exemplified in its temporary reign on the stage, look at Congreve. Turn to Thackeray's sparkling essay and contemplate the whited sepulchre that fashion gave as a reflection in "The Double Dealer" and "The Way of the World." It is difficult to believe that the period of which "the great Mr. Congreve" was the bright particular star, stands between that of Shakespeare and our own. We may grant that John Bull is false and unreliable in his artistic instincts, but the welcome conclusion must be made, that his heart is in its right place. Give us somebody to love and sympathize with rightly and take to our hearts, or we shall

find it an empty, hollow business. Sympathy is not wanting in the best modern plays of English growth. The best actors encourage it, are in touch with it, and work on it, but the play-wright must provide the material. It is often a test of the greatest popularity. You will find it in "The School for Scandal," "The Road to Ruin," "Black Eyed Susan," "Masks and Faces," "The Green Bushes," "Never too late to Mend," "Caste," "Two Roses," "Our Boys," and a hundred other plays, unequal in merit and unlike in style, but possessing this one great and attractive feature.

What was the great charm of the work of T. W. Robertson, apart from its rendering and treatment, to which it seems to me a very great proportion of its attractiveness was due? It certainly was not in construction or plot, for they were weak points with its author; he was too often very deficient in what I have called "story;" and though, as we shall see, he could write good "dialogue," it was not to that he owed his popularity. I think it was due mainly to a largeness of heart and sympathy, which in his best work showed clearly a reflection of both Thackeray and Dickens through the medium of his own personality. "Caste," in the latter qualities, so well illustrates him that one or two allusions to this delightful play, which may be reminders to many, will probably be welcome.

The second act concludes with George D'Alroy's reluctance to leave his wife, Esther, when he is ordered out on foreign service; with the visit of his mother, the Marquise (the only character a little out of drawing), and her son's tender request to Esther that she should buckle his sword-belt on to please his mother. She

fails in the task and falls into her husband's arms overcome. There is beauty and naturalness in this, but not till the third act does the author show his mastery of the instrument he plays on. There is Polly Eccles's defence of her disreputable old father, and Esther's rebuke to him when she stands up on behalf of her infant. Then comes the spirited and beautiful speech of Esther when she reads Hawtree's note, with the cheque enclosed ; George's unexpected return and Polly's delight ; the pleasure of George on learning he is a father ; his gratitude to Hawtree for his care of Esther, and the discovery that Sam Gerridge bought the piano for her ; Hawtree's appreciation of Sam, and Polly's ruse to let Esther know the welcome news, and the touching meeting at last of husband and wife. It is difficult to conceive anything of its kind more exquisite than all this. When you hear it said that "the public does not want heart and feeling, and that kind of thing now-a-days," be assured that the source from which such a statement comes is shallow and unreliable, and utterly deficient in the qualities it would depreciate. May the English stage never cease to value the truth in the common acceptation of the popular but ever beautiful maxim, "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin !"

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE MECHANISM OF A PLAY.

"THE Scenario, yes, that is the difficulty of a play!" This exclamation came from my friend the late Wilkie Collins, one winter afternoon, during a delightful chat; the last, though I little suspected it, that I was destined to enjoy with him. An opinion of the popular novelist may be of interest to that wide circle which knows and has found pleasure in his work as a writer of stories. To those who were not privileged to know the man, I may take the opportunity of saying that the kindest and truest nature was possessed by one whose gifts of dramatic and constructive interest were in many respects masterly. In spite of these gifts he did not become successful without the closest and most arduous labour, and I think he owed much to a careful examination of the best work of the French in this respect. There were few who were more thoroughly aware of the value and importance of construction as a factor in human interest.

In a letter which I received from him four years since, he mentions some words of encouragement, of which he was naturally proud. He speaks of one of his early short stories, "Which had the honour of keeping Scribe in a breathless condition. He prophesied all my later

success from that little specimen, when I was presented to him in Paris."

The playgoer will remember what the stage owes to the part author of "La Bataille de Dames." That Wilkie Collins's estimate of the value and difficulty of a scenario is the right one, will be clear to those who know anything of the art of play-making. It should be the first step in the mechanism of it.

There is a story told about a writer, an untried dramatist, who in a glow of enthusiasm, having obtained access to a manager, overwhelmed him with a rapid and excited sketch of a play he was ambitious to undertake. The manager did his best to follow the lines of the plot, and gave him an assenting nod now and then, in the course of a very long recital. "What do you think of that?" inquired the aspirant triumphantly when he had finished. "There's something in it," replied the manager quietly. "You've got it at home I daresay on paper. Will you let me see the sketch?" "At home!" exclaimed the other. "My dear fellow," (pressing his hands down on his cranium), "*I've got it all here; I should spoil it on paper!*"

However clearly the details of a plot may present themselves, it will be found that when it comes to putting it on paper the difficulties begin. It will be necessary to have settled upon some leading "motif;" that it should be thoroughly sound and probable, has been already shown. Now mentally, the ramifications of this may seem clear and practicable enough, and present themselves vividly to the writer's imagination, but if he be incapable of working them out tangibly, and only trusts to an inspiration that may be slow in arriv-

ing, or perhaps not arrive at all, his dangers and difficulties will be at once evident. He may rest assured that that troublesome *dénouement* will not prove one of his least formidable obstacles. Some novelists with a proper regard for "story" declare the scenario is a crux, but others do not allow this to be so.

The laws of fiction, however, are much less stringent than those of the drama, but, unless like Canning's knife-grinder, the cry is,—

"Story! God bless you! I have none to tell, sir,"

a plan, or scenario, is a most desirable preliminary. The full scenario of a long play is, even to the most gifted author, a laborious work, but having completed it one great difficulty is over.

Probably there are many dramatists who could fill out a play more easily than they could produce it in skeleton form; for the scenario is also a growth. Others will write and re-write, building up all the framework till they are satisfied. There is an important difficulty in preparing a scenario that must not be lost sight of. It is that of the "pump-and-tub" of our friend Mr. Crummles.

As a manager is more often than not an ambitious actor also, the experienced dramatist is fully aware that he will require a good "part" for himself. The honourably artistic circumstances under which he consents to forego the temptation of acting, if conducive to the artistic effect as a whole, are by no means uncommon, but he is compelled to appear sometimes for the purpose of "strengthening the bill." Again, not only the manager, but the manager's wife must be provided for.

There may be also "infant phenomena" to take into account. Add to this a special company that is to be fitted, and it will be understood what is meant by the "pump-and-tub" difficulty.

Now, it is comprehensible that, as those for whom "parts" are required are not likely to be gifted with the attributes of a Talma, a Garrick, a Kean, a Siddons, or even lesser lights, and as the dramatist's success must depend on the way his work is treated—he must expect to have, and does in fact, a task of no slight magnitude before him. That such obstacles as present themselves are overcome successfully, is a proof of the great ingenuity of some of our play-wrights. An eminent writer told me he never could write a play for a particular company. As a finished play is far more easy for a manager to read than any scenario, inasmuch as the great attractions, if any, of the dialogue are before him, it will be seen that unless an author is willing to undertake the labour of a full play, the only plan he can adopt will be to construct a scenario in a tentative fashion, in such a manner as would allow of its expansion or contraction as the case may be, in any given direction. This is not easy, but the first line of my formula, previously given, is only in accord with it. The old saying, that "good acting makes good play-writing" is a true one, and a careful study of plays that have been successful in a marked degree, will show that each period has handed down to its successor many "situations" and incidents which, when skilfully developed by good acting, have been made acceptable by bringing them into accordance and sympathy with modern ideas and tastes.

The more literal phase of the Crummles system,

writing up to certain "situations," scenes, and "effects," needs but the slightest allusion. Whether it be in connection with a house on fire, a sinking ship, an explosion in a mine, or a race-course, it is the exception, rather than the rule, to find good construction or delicacy and truth in characterization. A play with sensation scenes is not necessarily a poor one, but the scheme of production is dangerous to work that hopes to stand any test of time. The class of audiences that is the main support of such productions is one for which realism and spectacle have the greatest charm. Finished dialogue in such pieces would be wasted labour.

Let me now explain a remark previously made, viz.—that in respect to play-making *story is distinct from plot.* In every drama certain events and incidents must be accepted by the audience as having occurred prior to the development of the play before their eyes. These acts and incidents it is essential that the audience should be put into possession of—they may be said to form a story. For example, in that favourite old play, "The Road to Ruin"—a very good and successful one—here is what is supposed to have occurred before the action on the stage commences :—

A wealthy Englishman (whose fortune amounts to 150,000*l.*) is married to a widow of forty, who has a daughter of eighteen by a former husband. This wealthy man dies in the South of France at the time his wife is in England. He has had a son who is deeply in debt. Before he died the father recommended the widow to pay this son's debts. It was left, however, to her prudence. The father has executed a will, the contents of which are made something of a mystery of

by those who witnessed it. When the play begins this will is supposed to be lost, etc., etc., etc.

Now all these details must be distinctly given to the audience. They form part of the story which must be interwoven with the actual plot. A skilled dramatist does not introduce them at once, as each item has its special value when duly dove-tailed into the piece and elaborated. As a matter of fact the first scene (with old Dornton, Mr. Smith and Sulky) makes no allusion to anyone of the characters in the above ; nor are the details mentioned. A playgoer who has never seen nor read "The Road to Ruin," will rightly enough infer that there is a good deal in that will as a motor. The audience learns something of it in the third scene of the first act, but not until the end of Act 2, in the scene between Silky and Goldfinch, does it show itself as a factor in the play. It is brought forward again in the third act in detail, where Silky reads it to the widow Warren, and its power culminates at the end of the play, when it is wrested from Silky the avaricious, by Sulky the beneficent.

If the details of story and plot are not clear to the dramatist, it is unlikely that they will be so to his audience, which is a mixed one—for "Spectators of the common class can hardly comprehend what they see and hear, unless they are hemmed in and guided to the sense at every turn." All this will show the necessity of a clear scenario. Deficiency in this respect, and taking things too much for granted, will also radically affect the characterization or naturalness in motive of the persons in the drama. A play of four or five acts contains far more "stuff" or material than is generally supposed.

The mass of incidents accumulated is great, though it is not all brought actually before an audience. In construction, scenes will beget scenes, and as in the art of the novelist, an author will find as he progresses, unexpected adventures, characters, and situations clamouring for admission. "Such tricks hath strong imagination." As some instructions as to the scenario, and other practical details will be given in a future chapter, we may turn our attention to such elements as are common to all popular and successful pieces, and which may be fairly regarded as part of the mechanism of the drama.

The one which I should place first, and which has come down to us from the remotest ages, is that of *Equivoke.* Although in its various forms it goes to make up the very essence of a play, its power is but half recognized or strangely neglected by many dramatic writers. As a device that is productive of mirth and humour, it has no equal, and though its importance in all fiction of a humorous kind is very high, it is on the stage that its fullest and finest effects are developed. Without it, farcical plays would simply cease to be, and comedy would be defrauded of half its charm. The humours and comic situations from misunderstandings or cross-purposes must have been a delight to man from the moment it was discovered that he had in him a capacity for laughter and the enjoyment of the droll and incongruous in life. Every street and shop and market-place has been the scene of the quaintest and the most mirth-provoking incidents, the foundation of which was equivoke. Aided by the actor's art its manifestations are a source of the keenest enjoyment. It is such a

force in the acting drama, and we have so many splendid examples of it that it is not easy to make selections. It is the mainstay of comedy, and though it is possible to mention successful comic plays in which equivoke is little used, the author who dispenses with it is throwing away a most valuable aid. Clever characterization must not be underrated, but its effect is materially heightened by the skilful use of this device. Some plays are merely one long equivoke. Nothing can be more apposite than Schlegel's remarks on this. Although he is dealing with comic Greek literature, what he says is of value to the stage of to-day.

"Neither can we allow the common division into *Plays of Character and Plays of Intrigue*, to pass without limitation. A good comedy ought always to be both, otherwise it will be deficient either in body or animation. Sometimes, however, the one and sometimes the other will, no doubt, preponderate. The development of the comic characters requires situations to place them in strong contrast, and these again can result from nothing but that crossing of purposes and events which, as I have already shown, constitutes intrigue in the dramatic sense."

Shakespeare, Molière, and every one of his successors who has achieved fame in the production of comedy, has been fully cognizant of the power of equivoke. In the hands of a master its capacities are as astonishing as they are delightful. The true management of equivoke, carried on through four or five acts without violating probability, is one of the tests of a writer's power to attain to comedy. Everyone knows the effect of it in the immortal Screen scene in "The School for Scandal,"

and those delightful episodes that are the glory of "The Rivals." To enumerate the dramas in which it plays a part would be simply to give a catalogue of the successes of the stage. Sheridan's two brilliant comedies are almost too well known to safely analyze. Our judgment is apt to be overcome in the admiration extorted by the treatment. There is a splendid instance of equivoke in "The Clandestine Marriage," an admirable play, if not quite deserving of Hazlitt's commendation that "it is nearly without a fault." As there are thousands of playgoers who have never seen it acted, nor read it, I will give the example in outline. The comedy was "made" by the elder Colman and David Garrick, very largely from a piece called "False Concord," by James Townley, a clergyman, to whom Garrick presented a living. He was the author of "High Life below Stairs." Old Lord Ogleby, the leading "part" in the play, is the concentrated essence of fastidious vanity. It made the reputation of King, its original exponent, who afterwards "created" Sir Peter Teazle.

The scene of which I am speaking, concludes the fourth act. Here are the lines of it roughly:—

Young Lovewell is married to Fanny Sterling, and it is expedient that for a time this should not be disclosed. Lovewell is in the employ of Mr. Sterling, Fanny's father, a rich merchant, who ranks money and interest before all things. Fanny is being persecuted by the attentions of Sir John Melvil, a nephew of Lord Ogleby's, who with his uncle is visiting at Sterling's house. Lovewell begs Fanny to confess their secret to Lord Ogleby, who is a kinsman of his own. Lovewell believes that notwithstanding his (Lord Ogleby's)

egregious vanity, etc., he will befriend them, and that his influence will put an end to Sir John Melvil's solicitations, and reconcile Sterling (Fanny's father) to the marriage. She consents, and Lovewell leaves her. Lord Ogleby comes on, and she tries to perform her task, but breaks down under it, and goes off leaving Lord Ogleby to infer that she is in love with him. He is hugely delighted, and decides to make her his wife at once. After an intervening scene, in which the interests of the other characters are concerned, Lovewell comes on and has an interview alone with Lord Ogleby. The result of this is to make Lovewell believe that Lord Ogleby forgives their marriage, when in fact he is trying to convey to Lovewell that Fanny has accepted him (Lord Ogleby) for a husband. At last the truth dawns on Lovewell that Lord Ogleby is bent on making Fanny, his wife, the Countess of Ogleby. Lovewell begins to remonstrate, and at this juncture Sir John Melvil enters and tells his uncle, Lord Ogleby, that he finds he cannot love Miss Sterling (Fanny's sister), but asks to be allowed to pay his addresses to Fanny—but let the dialogue finish it :—

Lord Ogleby : Oh yes, by all means. Have you any hopes there, nephew ? (*Smiling and winking at Lovewell.*) Do you think he'll succeed, Lovewell ?

Lovewell (*gravely*) *:* I think not, my lord.

Lord Ogleby : I think so too ; but let the fool try.

Sir John Melvil : Will your lordship favour me with your good offices to remove the chief obstacle to the match, the repugnance of Mrs. Heidelberg ?

Lord Ogleby : Mrs. Heidelberg ? Had not you better begin with the young lady first ! (*Smiling.*) It will save

you a great deal of trouble, won't it, Lovewell? But do what you please, it will be the same thing to me. (*Conceitedly.*) Won't it, Lovewell? Why don't you laugh at him?

Lovewell (*forcing a smile*): I do, my lord.

Sir John Melvil: And your lordship will endeavour to prevail on Mrs. Heidelberg to consent to my marriage with Miss Fanny?

Lord Ogleby: I'll speak to Mrs. Heidelberg about the adorable Fanny as soon as possible.

Sir John Melvil: Your generosity transports me.

Lord Ogleby (*aside*): Poor fellow, what a dupe! He little thinks who's in possession of the town.

Sir John Melvil: And your lordship is not in the least offended at this seeming inconstancy?

Lord Ogleby: Not in the least. Miss Fanny's charms will even excuse infidelity. I look upon women as the *feræ naturæ*, lawful game, and every man who is qualified has a natural right to pursue them. Lovewell as well as you, and you as well as he, and I as well as either of you. Every man shall do his best, without offence to any. What say you, kinsmen?

Sir John Melvil: You have made me happy, my lord.

Lovewell: And me, I assure you, my lord.

Lord Ogleby: And I am superlatively so. *Allons donc!* To horse and away, boys. You to your affairs and I to mine. *Suivons l'amour!* (*Sings, etc.*)

And the act drop comes down.

Nothing can be better than this. Carried off by good acting it is a delight to witness such a scene. What I have said before must be firmly borne in mind, that these old comedies demand not only high skill in the his-

trionic art, but natural gifts of power and vitality to do them thorough justice. The scene is carried on long enough, but not too long. The inexperienced dramatist might have been tempted to prolong it, which would have been fatal to its real effect.

Equivoke of situation is a puissant weapon, but not easy to handle. Goldsmith succeeded with it in "She Stoops to Conquer." But the best use is not made of it in "The Good-Natured Man." The scene in which the bailiffs figure is well known, if only from Leslie's picture. Its effect comes very considerably from a quality we may have to examine later on—violation of propriety—and requires skill in the acting, to keep it within the bounds of pure comedy. There is good equivoke in the second act, when Miss Richland, Leontine and Croaker are on the stage, but it is not satisfactory, being cut short by Croaker sending his collocutors off. In the scene also where Croaker forgives (the pretended) Olivia for being in love as he thinks with a rich man; she believing that her engagement to Leontine is sanctioned, the equivoke is not made the most of. It finishes the act and it wants carrying off with more spirit and "go." Again, in Act 3, where Miss Richland takes Sir William Honeywood for a creditor, the full effect is not obtained. A similar case, by the way, which is always very droll in the acting is in "The Road to Ruin," where the widow Warren takes old Dornton for the clergyman. The contrast of character, the hurt and indignant father, and the lax, vulgar widow, lend themselves forcibly to the humour of the situation. The lady's pressing him to try 'a morsel of seed-cake, a glass of Constantia, or a jelly,' knowing these "little cordial comforts are agreeable consolations" to gentlemen of his cloth, is delicious.

In single lines of equivoke, those of Joseph Surface in "The School for Scandal" are as good as can be. They occur on his reception of Sir Peter in the Screen scene :—

Sir Peter: In short, my dear friend, Lady Teazle's conduct of late has made me extremely unhappy.

Joseph: Indeed! I am very sorry to hear it.

Sir Peter: Ay, 'tis too plain she has not the least regard for me; but what's worse, I have pretty good authority to suppose she has formed an attachment to another.

Joseph: Indeed! You astonish me!

Sir Peter: Yes, and between ourselves, I think (*putting his hand on Joseph's arm*) I've discovered the person.

Joseph: How! You alarm me exceedingly.

Sir Peter: Ay, my dear friend, I knew you would sympathize with me.

Joseph: Yes, believe me, Sir Peter, such a discovery would hurt me just as much as it would you.

Congreve and his fellows did some wonderful things with equivoke; their choice of subject giving them a latitude happily out of the reach of modern dramatists. Among the work of the latter, there is a clever and pretty scene of equivoke in the late James Albery's "Two Roses." The author produced many brilliant scenes in plays which did not obtain popularity, and he was fully conscious of the value of equivoke, particularly in dialogue, but his sense of humour was apt to carry him too far, and induce him to let it run into farce. The scene in the "Two Roses" finishes the second act, and is too well known to need giving in detail. The episode of Caleb Deecie and his delicate loyalty is very pretty

and human. The situation evolved, too, has the rare merit of strength and tenderness. The defect in the play's construction is in the baby-changing improbability and the manner of its disclosure in the last act. But it is a very charming work, if only on account of its delightful and entertaining dialogue, of which we may find more to say.

Every playgoer and student of the drama will call to mind many instances in which equivoke is the quality which forms the main attraction of the play. As in farcical comedy of the modern type, it was the strongest lever in old-fashioned broad farce.

It is often remarked how little real original motive presents itself in the theatre. It must be for a reason similar to that given by Hazlitt in answer to "Why there are so few good modern comedies?" namely, "Because there have been so many already written." And in truth the closer one studies dramatic literature, the more evident it becomes, that pure invention of first motive is well nigh impossible. But as the old and tried are best, it is reassuring to know that fresh treatment of familiar motives, and a clever use of the complications that may arise from skill and ingenuity, are as welcome as ever. Musicians of experience are able to identify the elements of old work in its ever-varying modern forms, but the enjoyment of it is not the less keen. So it is with the drama. A skilful treatment of old motives must not be regarded as mere appropriation. Adapting from the works of others will probably never be out of fashion, but it should ask some share of originality in the treatment, where it is being carried on consciously; and authors should—well, "convey, the wise it call"—with a sense of moderation.

Critics have pointed out the bold way in which Mrs. Cowley in "The Belle's Stratagem" has adapted without improvement some of the best things in Congreve, Goldsmith, Murphy, and Sheridan, and made from them an effective acting play. The scene of Valentine and his assumed madness from ("Love for Love") is a most daring piece of pillage.

To enter minutely into the mechanism of the acting drama in its comedy form, would be impossible in a single volume of ordinary dimensions. An analysis of a play will be given later on, the careful study of which will prove, I think, of solid value. Meantime let us glance at certain elements which always prove attractive in a play, and are sure sources of legitimate amusement or gratification.

Is it necessary to say that *a Love interest* is of the first importance—the youthful kind preferred. Love interest, too, of a healthy, hopeful nature; not made up of gloomy, depressing episodes, nor vapid, commonplace utterances, but such as brings with it the odour and brightness of Spring. A well written and well acted love scene never yet failed to delight an audience, and it is to be hoped never will. There must be fervour and reality in the author's treatment, or the best acting may be powerless to show that the puppets are anything but dolls stuffed with sawdust. How delicious are the memories of well executed love scenes in comedy, comedy-drama, or that, in England, very successful form, the domestic drama. Unsophisticated, half-comic, or idyllic in tone, it matters not, if the touch be true and tender. How pleasant are the remembrances of Helen and Modus in "The Hunchback," Sophia and Harry in "The Road to Ruin," and some of the love

duets of Douglas Jerrold, Tom Taylor, Charles Reade, T. W. Robertson and James Albery. If we were reviewing the higher drama, what visions could be conjured up of the eternally beautiful scenes in "As you like it," or those of Ferdinand and Miranda, or Henry the Fifth and Katharine. It is tempting to cross the water and call up memories of the Comédie Française. Those who have seen De Musset's "Il ne faut jurer de rien" and "On ne badine pas avec l'amour" will have learnt how to appreciate love scenes of rare beauty, treated with all the distinction, finesse, and ardour, that can be bestowed on them.

The author who can present such scenes efficiently is met half way in the difficulty by the artistes, to whom they are as welcome as to the audience. There are many instances in which love scenes and episodes have saved plays from utter failure. They lighten and give a charm to pieces of the heaviest type. All interests become languid without that magic touch.

> "Common as light is love,
> And its familiar voice wearies not ever."

There must be something of the poet in the dramatist who would treat love scenes with success.

Then there are the scenes of affection which involve the conflict of mother and daughter, or father and son. The number of ways in which the bond of affection has been the means of opposing interest, and yielding admirable scenes, would be astonishing, if we did not remember that the fibres of sympathy in such contests have their roots deeply fixed in human nature. Sometimes the treatment is comic, as in that of Sir Anthony

Absolute and his son, or charged with fine feeling, as in that splendid example of old Dornton and his son, or it may be handled in a more homely but not less touching form, as with Middlewick and his son in "Our Boys."

Another attractive power which belongs to the mechanism of a play, although it may be regarded as a touchstone of what is human and sympathetic—is that which I will call the *Adjustment of caste.* When the balance or poise is well kept, there are few things more effective and interesting. It is the arbitration or umpire of the heart. The name of Robertson's best play, "Caste," is indicative of its most taking features. Playgoers know well how skilfully he treated it in this delightful drama, as in other pieces of his writing. It is the pivot too of "New Men and Old Acres." With what skill and judgment the Vavasours and Bunters are brought to the poll, with Samuel Brown, the Liverpool merchant, to give the casting vote. It is done again, though in a coarser way, in the baronet and the butterman in "Our Boys," and used with effect by the same author in "Uncle Dick's Darling," and many of his other plays. It is a popular feature in "John Bull," "All that Glitters," "The Post-Boy," "The Rough Diamond," "The Colleen Bawn," and dozens of favourite pieces.

Another device that has always been a source of amusement in the theatre, consists of *Quarrelling Scenes in the Dual form.* In speaking of the stage and its uses in presenting passion, Charles Lamb says, "Scolding scenes, scenes where two persons talk themselves into a fit of fury, and then in a surprising manner talk themselves out of it again, have always been the most popular upon our stage."

Benedick and Beatrice, and Sir Peter and Lady Teazle, will occur to everyone, but the old plays generally supply a long list of contentious episodes, such as we find in "The Double Dealer," "The Provoked Husband," "The Wonder," "The Jealous Wife," "The Honeymoon," "The Love Chase," not to mention numbers of modern examples. They may be called love scenes with a difference; they give great opportunities to the actor and actress. One of the best illustrations is that of Lord and Lady Townly's scenes in Vanbrugh and Cibber's clever and amusing comedy of "The Provoked Husband." The play was popular as late as Macready's time—and indeed, but for the distasteful episode of Count Basset and Myrtilla, might well be put upon the stage at the present time. The Townly scenes are extremely effective in the acting. Their original exponents were Wilks and the beautiful Mrs. Oldfield, poor Savage's benefactress. Mrs. Jordan, Miss O'Neill, Young, Elliston, and John and Charles Kemble played in the comedy on various occasions. Mrs. Oldfield is said to have been trained in the part by Cibber.

"She *rushed* upon the stage with the full consciousness of youth, beauty, and attraction. . . . When she came to describe the superior privileges of a married above a single woman, she repeated the whole of that lively speech with a rapidity, and *gaieté de cœur*, that electrified the whole house. Their applause was so unbounded, that when Wilks, who played Lord Townly, answers 'Prodigious' the audience applied that word as a compliment to the actress, and again gave her the shouts of their approbation."

Another "trick of the scene" that is always welcome

in the theatre, is that of *Presenting an Imitation or imaginative picture*, giving scope to the actor for mimicry. Allusion has just been made to it in the excerpt given. Another most effective example occurs in a later part of the same comedy, in the scene between Lady Townly and Lady Grace, in which the former gives a sketch of her daily occupations, and the discussion of town life *versus* country, is carried on with great animation. The scenes of Julia in "The Hunchback," Mrs. Candour and Lady Teazle, Lydia Languish's ideal elopement, Graves and Lady Franklin (in "Money") with innumerable versions of this artifice in more modern pieces, will occur to every lover of the play. There is a very amusing specimen of it in a piece less known, though at one time declared to be the best comedy since "The School for Scandal." It is "The Heiress," by General Burgoyne, who came so bravely off under the accusations made against his honour in the American War. The comedy is said to have been compiled from "The Sister," and Diderot's "Le Père de Famille." The example of which we are speaking is in the scene where Miss Alscrip, Lady Emily Gayville, and Mrs. Blandish are on the stage—and is a capital "skit" on the follies and absurdities of the day. Lady Emily corrects the affected laugh of Miss Alscrip, the manner of it "being exploded since Lady Simpermode broke a tooth." Lady Emily sets her mouth in the fashion to be assumed for the coming winter, which is to be called the "Paphian mimp."

Then there is *the fine Satirical Effect to be obtained by a person condemning something in another, which he has been, or is, guilty of himself.* As when Sir Anthony

Absolute, in a fury with his son, asks, "Can't you be cool like me?" etc. Or where Mrs. Malaprop would have Lydia, "mistress of orthodoxy, that she might not mis-spell and mis-pronounce words so shamefully as girls usually do; and likewise that she might reprehend the true meaning of what she is saying."

There are good examples of it in "The Clandestine Marriage." Sterling, who has confessed to "the dew in his great toe," is afterwards anxious to get Lord Ogleby (a martyr to rheumatism and other infirmities) to walk through his extensive grounds, and the old lord earnestly entreats his host on the plea of solicitude to consider his gout.

And in the scene where the decrepit Lord Ogleby encounters Fanny, and with charming unconsciousness alludes to Canton, his Swiss valet, as unworthy of being called a third person, as "from age and infirmities he stands for nothing."

Again, in "New Men and Old Acres," when Bunter, lecturing the German Blasenbalg, says, "Swearing even in unknown tongues 'urts my feelings as a Cheristian," and the next moment, on hearing that "Underhand and Goldney are reported shaky," etc., he indulges in the habit himself.

Then there is what may be called *the "Nature will out" contrivance*, which some of us will remember being served up in *Punch*, years ago—(*Punch*, by the way, is a wonderful record of dramatic scenes). It is the incident of the disguised stable-boy at the dinner-party, bringing in the plunging blanc-mange, and giving vent to "Wo-ho there! Wo-o-o-o!!" We have it again in a very droll form, where Mr. Dove, in Buckstone's old

piece "Married Life," forgets himself. Mrs. Dove was the mistress of a boarding-school, but afterwards retired and married her footman. Consequently, when they go into society, and Dove chances to hear a bell ring, it is as much as his wife can do to prevent his rushing to answer it. It certainly presupposes a promptness and energy not always associated with that branch of society to which Mr. John Smauker and Mr. Tuckle belonged. Do we not also call to mind that amusing incident in the "Two Roses," where Jenkins, the retired "Commercial," who has become connected with a "Little Bethel," asks Caleb Deecie to join them, and promises to get him in "trade price." Hundreds of similar instances will occur to the experienced play-goer. "These are very common and vulgar expedients," some reader may exclaim. Possibly. But a moment's reflection will enable us to see what trifles and absurdities are often the very hinges of humour, and to be deficient in this great faculty is to be deprived of some of the greatest enjoyments of life.

A venerable device that is allied to the last, and which properly perhaps belongs to Dialogue, is that of using the *Characteristic Slang common to all avocations*, —the talk of the "shop," in fact. William in "Black-Eyed Susan" is a good example of the use of it in sailors. It is true enough to nature in a measure, and has always been in favour with the old play-wrights, but it is sadly overdone, even allowing for the necessary "colour" in character.

It has been remarked by Hazlitt, among others, that "there is nothing that goes down better than what relates to *Eating and Drinking*, on the stage." The

indictment, though open to the charge of vulgarity, is perfectly true. It is a harmless enough tribute to realism, and very amusing to watch the intense anxiety on the part of the audience to know what the actors engaged in the scene are absolutely consuming, or pretending to consume. The best lines in the play are as nothing compared to this distraction. Apropos, the story may be remembered of the ill-bred gentleman who had escorted some ladies to the stalls of a theatre, but had not dined himself. There was a rather elaborate scene of refreshment in the play, and the hungry one had watched the soup and fish disappear with all the sufferings of martyrdom. An entrée was next served and uncovered (the real thing, and very savoury,) and sent forth its tempting fumes into the body of the house. One of the ladies was craning her neck with huge interest, and determined to assure herself that there was "no deception." "Awfully good, isn't it?" she exclaimed. "Yes," said the gentleman in utter desperation, rising and moving off, "and I'm going to get something like it too!"

Another feature related to the "Nature will out" phase, and which is forcible in plays that admit of a certain amount of the farce element and bustle, is *Violation of propriety*—the fun generally being derived from the contrast afforded by characters directly antagonistic to each other in rank of life, tastes, habits, etc. It is played upon very much, and successfully, in all plays that deal with *the Adjustment of cast.* Skilfully used, its effect is irresistible. It is so common a device in the theatre, that I need scarcely quote examples. The actors concerned in its illustration are

responsible for its "not o'erstepping the modesty of (stage) nature," and failing in its lawful effect. It is legitimately used in the scene of the reading of the will in "Money," where Stout and Sir John Vesey behave so outrageously. It will be remembered what admirable scenes of humour its use occasioned in "The Colonel," so popular some years since. Still more broadly treated, it became the attractive feature in "The Private Secretary." It is an essential of purely farcical plays. It was a very favourite weapon with the late Henry J. Byron, some of the situations brought about by a contrast of dignity and familiar impudence being highly amusing.

I have spoken of the charm of brightness and gaiety in scenes of love interest, the same attributes will, without exception, be found to be a necessity in what pertains to comedy. High spirits must be the especial characteristic of all real comedy scenes. The quality, though associated with types of stage character, is sometimes a power or motive in the play. How it is utilized in the Charles Surface scenes is known to everybody. Half the attraction of many plays arises from a full consciousness of this. There is a capital instance of it in Congreve's "Love for Love," which I think Hazlitt somewhere calls attention to. When Trapland, the scrivener, comes for his money—a debt of long standing —Valentine and Scandal ply him with wine, and by the sheer force of audacity and exuberance of spirits make him lose sight of what he has come for, although he has two tipstaffs waiting outside.

What would "The Game of Speculation" be (Balzac's "Mercadet") without the irrepressible spirits in con-

junction with the *savoir faire?* Those who have seen Charles Mathews's artistic performance of Mr. Affable Hawk, are conscious of what the effect can be with an actor who understands the importance of life and vivacity allied to elegance and distinction.

In a totally different key, another phase of attractiveness is the wild despair of a young and handsome man, out of favour with fortune. Its highest exemplification is in Prince Hamlet. We have it in the plight in which Wellborn, in "A New Way to Pay Old Debts," finds himself, or Harry Dornton, when he is pledged to marry the widow Warren. Sydney Carton in Dickens's wonderful "Tale of Two Cities," which suggested "All for Her" (the clever play by Messrs. Palgrave Simpson and Herman Merivale), is a good example. It is effectively presented in Watts Phillips's "Camilla's Husband." A mad scene, real or assumed, or a condition of inebriety, are more often than not its concomitants, and are conditions offering splendid opportunities to an actor of sympathetic gifts. Valentine in "Love for Love," in the fourth act, is another instance. It is the ingenious scene imitated by Mrs. Cowley. Valentine, to free himself from a bond made with his father, assumes madness. It is done in the presence of others, beside his mistress. When the other characters leave the stage, he avows to her that it was merely a bit of acting. The humour of the thing is finely carried on, however, and the lady takes her revenge by insisting upon it that he is really mad.

Let me conclude this section with an allusion to the value of *Soliloquies* and the kindred device which we know as *Asides*. Most comedies of the first class will

yield a lesson in their power and usefulness. Asides form an important feature in the employment of equivoke. A very good illustration of their treatment is in the third act of "The Rivals," where Mrs. Malaprop listens to the dialogue carried on between Lydia and Captain Absolute. But these, among other contrivances that belong to the mechanism of a play, may be studied more easily by the help of the Analysis to be given in a future chapter.

CHAPTER V.

TYPES OF CHARACTER AND DIALOGUE.

IT may be well now to consider what types of character are effective and popular on the stage, and also what it is that proves attractive in dialogue.

As with original motive, it is astonishing to find how little there is that is new in character. Schlegel, in speaking of the new comedy of the Greeks, enumerates the types that were most in vogue. The list is not a long one, and, as he points out, the characters occur again and again.

"The austere and stingy, or the mild, easy father, the latter not unfrequently under the dominion of his wife, and making common cause with his son against her; the housewife either loving and sensible, or scolding and domineering, and presuming on the accession she has brought to the family property; the young man giddy and extravagant, but frank and amiable, who even in a passion sensual at its commencement, is capable of true attachment."

Are not these the prototypes of beings that are familiar to us on the modern stage?

"The girl of light character, either thoroughly depraved, vain, cunning, and selfish, or still good-hearted and susceptible of better feelings; the simple and clownish, and the cunning slave who assists his young master in cheating his old father . . . The flatterer, or

accommodating parasite, who, for the sake of a good meal, is ready to say or do anything that may be required of him; the sycophant, a man whose business it was to set quietly-disposed people by the ears, and stir up law-suits, for the conduct of which he offered his services," etc., etc.

These, and others mentioned, will be recognized as types employed in thousands of plays since the far-distant days of Menander. We may safely assume that as they have lasted so long, they are sure of a fair popularity in the future.

With whatever skill and elaboration a character may be portrayed for the stage, it will be liable to resolve itself into a typical figure in the actual presentment. Experience shows that there are characteristics of a certain kind that prove effective and tell well in the acting. The most highly finished and delicately painted portrait may fail to prove as successful as the dramatist anticipated, from disregard or ignorance of this law. An author may spare no labour over a character, he may make it truthful and natural, and show that he has real insight and knowledge of human nature, that, in short, he is a master of that much-talked-of but little-understood quality, psychology, but all this will avail him nothing if he has not learnt to some extent what the art of acting can make effective. When his work is submitted to a stage expert, he is horrified to find that what has cost him unusual pains is, by the cruel operation of "cutting," reduced to a mere outline. Beyond a certain point, complexity of character, with all its shades and facets, fails of effect before an average audience. Fiction has a greater latitude.

Whatever difficulties the works of Mr. George Meredith may present to the ordinary reader, he will discover in them, here and there, profoundly dramatic scenes. This much I think will be admitted, without going so far as Mr. Louis Stevenson, who asserts that one scene in "The Ordeal of Richard Feverel," is the "strongest since Shakespeare in the English tongue." Some episodes would act with great effect. Moreover, in certain characters and their treatment, he displays the highest comic power. We may grant that Congreve's Millamant would be an anomaly now, but the skilled painting of the Countess in "Evan Harrington," for instance, is a proof that originality and pure comedy in character are not extinct. To put into acting form such an admirably finished portrait, would require a talent that is in some degree a technical one, for it necessitates not only condensation, but the knowledge of how far acting is a substitute for words.

An author in the creation of a character will often mentally see a certain actor or actress in the "part." To write for any given artiste, makes this a necessity. Should the author be sure of the cast, there can be little objection to the plan, inasmuch as he has the power of moulding his characters to the idiosyncrasies of his interpreters ; but if from any reason the artiste for whom the "part" is intended is unable to play it, and it should be one presenting special difficulties, the dramatist may find that his piece is exposed to great risk with regard to its success ; the very best acting being, as I must repeat, always a scarce commodity.

Acting characters resolve themselves inevitably into certain types or classes. This was the natural origin of

what is called in the theatre "lines of business," a system that often helped the rising dramatist. The expression may not be generally understood. In a full company of actors there was always to be found a representative for every particular style of character in the play—"the leading man," "the heavy man," "the first old man," "the juvenile tragedian," "the light comedian," "the walking gentleman," "the low comedian," "the leading lady," "the juvenile lady," "the first old woman," "the chambermaid or *soubrette*," etc. etc. These were capable of combinations and extensions, as, "the heavy and character business," "second low comedy," etc. etc. The nomenclature, or something like it, was in use from the earliest times, and was the natural outcome of a necessity. It had its drawbacks and its advantages, the latter preponderating. The competent actor, if he did not from physical or other reasons appear to advantage in one "part," was pretty certain to get his opportunity with another, that belonged to him and came to him as a right. If "the heavy man" did not in the Ghost in "Hamlet," shine to any great extent (perhaps on account of the glowworm and his "ineffectual fire"), he had the opportunity of "holding fast the mortal sword" and bestriding his "downfall'n birthdom" as Macduff; or the actress to whom Desdemona was distasteful, rejoiced when the occasion came for her to play Rosalind.

The advantage to the author was this: frequent changes in the bill, in other words an altered programme, enabled him to ascertain the capacities of the different actors in plays that were tested and found successful. His observations allowed him to see where

the strength and weakness of any particular artiste lay, or what he could do in a given situation. The conditions of the stage have so altered, and are still altering, that it would be of little use to enter into all the *pros* and *cons* of the subject.

The greatest and most gifted actors cannot be good in everything, assuming that the adjective includes truth of delineation. Garrick did not play many of the greatest Shakespearian characters at all. He well knew his weak points. I believe I am right in asserting that he never appeared as Brutus, Coriolanus, Wolsey, Henry the Fifth, and Jaques; nor did he act Falstaff, Quin being a favourite in the part; nor Shylock, on account of Macklin's success in "The Merchant of Venice."

An author will find it of the greatest value to make himself master of such types of character as have always been popular and attractive. It is not necessary that he should express them conventionally. Some of them are obsolete, and he has to fight against the want of "colour" in modern life, but there are still equivalents to be found, and the finish in treatment offered by the modern stage is in his favour. The fop may be Osric, Lord Foppington, Sir Benjamin Backbite, Tom Shuffleton, Sir Frederick Blount, or Captain Hawtree—but he is a fop still, and though he may change his hue, will never lose his effect in the hands of the skilful actor. Schlegel's advice is still applicable, and of some value to writers who aim at too much in the delineation of character. Alluding to dramatists of his own time, he says, "For the sake of novelty of character, they torture themselves to attain complete individuality, by which efforts no other effect generally is produced than that of diverting our attention from the main business of the

piece, and dissipating it on accessory circumstances, and then after all, they imperceptibly fall back again into the old well-known character."

What follows, too, should be noted by those who have yet to gain a full experience of the stage and its conditions. "It is better to delineate the characters at first with a certain breadth, and to leave the actor room to touch them up more accurately, and to add the nicer and more personal traits, according to the requirements of each composition."

We will hastily review some of the old and favourite types. Let us first look at *The Old Men*—who are full of variety (always having regard to such plays as have attained undoubted success). In a great number of these "parts" personal vanity has a large share. Whims and crochets are common attributes too, with a certain testiness and petulance. Sir Peter Teazle and Lord Ogleby are both splendid specimens. The latter, by the way, Garrick intended for himself; and although he admitted King's excellence, always had the belief that he could have beaten him in it. Lord Chalkstone in his own farce of "Lethe," resembles the character. The influence of Cibber, in his acting of foppish "parts," makes itself manifest in an older type, in Lord Ogleby. His celebrated Lord Foppington in his own play of "The Careless Husband" is not known to the stage of our time. Sir Harcourt Courtly in "London Assurance," is another reflex of this style of character. Beau Farintosh in "School," and many modern versions will occur to habitual playgoers. The artistic capital such "parts" yield to actors is very great, and they are always both amusing and attractive.

Then there is *The Breezy, Loud, Self-willed, Dictatorial*

old gentleman, whose likeness we have in Sir Anthony Absolute, Sir Oliver Surface, Sir George Thunder in "Wild Oats," and Colonel Hardy in "Paul Pry." Granted that he was well known in fiction (the prototype of Sir Anthony was said to be Matthew Bramble), he is always very entertaining in the theatre. The "part" in its breadth and vitality, is a particularly British production; as also is that of *The Upright Merchant*, of whom old Dornton may be taken as a model, although it is not often the treatment of such parts is as natural and human as in "The Road to Ruin."

The Testy and Choleric are qualities that never fail to divert in old men. One of the very best studies of this kind is Sir Fretful Plagiary in "The Critic"—which was a sketch of Cumberland, the author of "The Wheel of Fortune," "The Jew," and other now forgotten plays. The elder Mathews used to give a wonderful imitation of this author, who, with all his vanity and petulance, seems to have been a well-bred man. It was reproduced, I have no doubt, by his son in his performance in "The Critic"—an admirable assumption.

The Fatuous and Amorous old man is another ever amusing and venerable type, as in Sir William Fondlove in "The Love Chase," and Sir Francis Gripe in "The Busy-Body."

The Avaricious old man is of a class which may include the tribe of misers, and is always popular. The Lovegolds, the Silkys, and the Daddy Hardacres belong to this.

Another favourite type of character is that of *The High-minded Aristocrat*, which we see well illustrated by Marmaduke Vavasour in "New Men and Old

Acres," Prince Perovsky in "Ours," and by similar "parts" in other plays of Robertson.

Then there is *The Self-seeking, Hypocritical, Worldly old man* of comparatively modern date, of whom Sir John Vesey in "Money" may be regarded as the precursor.

The types in *The Pathetic class of old men* in the domestic and more serious form of comedy-drama, are varied and effective. A list of the characters that were played by Webster, Robson, and the elder Farren, and in our own time so successfully by Mr. Toole, would include many of these. Triplet, in "Masks and Faces," is an admirable instance of the blending of the humorous and pathetic, without descending either to silliness or bathos. It will be seen that rigid classification is impossible, as characteristics and attributes get merged one into the other in the various types.

Although not by any means confined to old men, there is an expression in the theatre that explains a class of "part" which, until the stage gets levelled to one dull uniformity, will always be of value. It is called technically *a character part.* That is, a "part" which in its exposition is capable of very marked, or it may be eccentric feature, in costume, voice, trick and manner. The type last mentioned belongs to it. Dickens's works are full of "character parts," which accounts for their popularity with a section of the public, when transferred to the stage. Where the novelist's work is dramatized, the actor cannot take the credit of creation, but it will be easily understood what opportunities the Gamps, the Peggottys, the Micawbers, the Captain Cuttles, the Quilps, the Swivellers and their numerous associates yield. Digby Grant in "Two Roses" and Eccles in

"Caste" are examples of popular parts of this description. Shakespeare boasts his "character parts"—and to some purpose: witness his Falstaff, Shallow, Dr. Caius, etc., etc. But these "parts" really belong to no particular period of life, and are sometimes as effective—or more so—in short characters, or those of few words—as in long ones.

Let us leave the older men and turn to a style of "part" that belongs to an earlier period of life. It may be called *The Type Sententious*. The characters in this list have not unfrequently "numbered years sufficient to correct their passions; and encountered difficulties enough to teach them sympathy," to use the language of one of them. They generally ask for an actor of "leading parts" to do them justice, as there is always a dignity and sometimes a mental power in them. Peregrine in "John Bull," and Lieutenant Worthington in "The Poor Gentleman," are instances. The latter, with his servant Corporal Foss, said to be suggested by Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim. Such characters also as Burchell in "The Vicar of Wakefield," Mildmay in "Still Waters run Deep," Brown in "New Men and Old Acres," belong rather to this class.

Another type that is always a safe one on the stage is that of *the character whose kindly actions, disprove and nullify, an assumed, or natural harshness or grimness of manner*. As Graves in "Money," Sulky in "The Road to Ruin," Croaker in "The Good-Natured Man," and Sir Robert Bramble in "The Poor Gentleman." The last named "part" is a good instance of this and other taking characteristics.

What may be denominated *Humbugs* would be difficult to classify. They may be old, like Sir John Vesey,

or middle-aged, like Digby Grant, or Bunter, or young like Joseph Surface. They are effective and always popular, but demand considerable skill from both author and actor in the treatment.

The Villain or evil genius of the stage also, is not easy to do more than generalize. It is a character that varies in sex, age, attributes, and degree of wickedness. The jaunty and the impudent have ever been welcome types. The pretentious like Lofty, and the disreputably mendacious like Robert Macaire, and the Jingle of "Pickwick."

With regard to young men, it may be said that an audience will endure almost anything but prigs and bores. The latter, which are a nuisance in fiction, are a greater one in the drama. *Over bashfulness* is funny as in Modus, Marlow, and Dolly Spanker ("London Assurance"), and *over impudence* is funny as in Dazzle, and the long list of "parts" played with such art and *aplomb* by the late Charles Mathews. While on this subject of impudent coolness, we may notice that the whole tribe of amusing *Servants and Valets*, with their readiness and unblushing effrontery, are mainly attractive for a like reason: the Brushes, the Fags, the Trips, the Cools, the Buckles, and all their congeners. They are sometimes merely pictures in little, of the Scapins and Mascarilles of Molière, of whose classical origin mention has already been made.

Little need be said either of *The "Walking Gentleman"* of the stage: the Hastingses, the Carelesses, the Milfords, and their brethren. The title may be nearly obsolete, but the type will always be a necessity.

A familiar style of "part" which, like the latter, can be called "*His Friend*," is of a much higher rank. It is

perhaps better known on the French than the English stage. It has considerable power as a motor in the play. It is always sympathetic and attractive to an audience, and may be equal in value to the hero or "leading part." Henry Clifford in "The Heiress," Tom Sutherland in "The Favourite of Fortune," and Stylus in "Society," are examples that occur to me.

Dialect parts seem to be extinct in any prominent way. Where are the Tykes, the John Moodys, the Wrongheads, the Harrowbys, and the Ashfields of the past?

"Low Comedy" parts it would be difficult in any reasonable space to examine in all their variety. There are the cowardly and boastful, as in Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Bob Acres, and Major Wellington de Boots; the bitter, as in Crabtree and Snarl; the boorish, as in Tony Lumpkin; the legal, as in Mark Meddle; the mischievous, as in Marplot and Paul Pry, and dozens of others—not to mention all the varieties in Jews and Scotch and Irish character.

I have been ungallant in leaving little space to speak of the ladies. Let me atone by saying that if their stage types are lacking in Cleopatra's "infinite variety" they at least are equal to Egypt's queen in attractiveness. A proof of the skill of many interpreters of female "parts" is the power they have of stamping their individualities on certain characters. Thus we have "Mrs. Jordan's parts," "Mrs. Glover's parts," "Madame Vestris's parts," etc. The same classification of course exists with actresses of a later date.

The "Fine Lady" parts of the past in all their glory, even the veterans among playgoers cannot recall; but if the pieces in which they are to be found had survived,

we should not have wanted actresses now equal to the Millamants, the Lady Townlys, and the Lady Betty Modishes of by-gone days. This is evidenced by what has been, and is, done with the material available. With the decline of artificial comedy and its manners, great opportunities for the actress in a certain groove have been entirely lost.

On the other hand, the modern stage has yielded a number of delightful characters in which the skill of the artiste has been taxed in a totally different manner. The truthful delineation of some of the most interesting types that the life of to-day yields, deserves the heartiest recognition. Single impersonations have on occasion been the source of great intellectual pleasure, as well as of more simple amusement.

That play is in danger of never becoming very successful in which the treatment of the heroine, or "leading lady's" part, is poor or unsatisfactory. In some pieces it will happen that the second lady's part will be more attractive from an acting point of view, but not unfrequently it will be found the materials might have been displayed in the character of the heroine. A phase of the leading part that has been for the last hundred years very popular is *The Domestic Heroine* This is natural enough in a home-loving country like our own. From all I can hear, our American and Australian cousins are as strongly attached to this familiar type.

The character of *The Adventuress*, though necessary and powerful, is not, even when intellectually treated, a very pleasant one.

Another type in which the domestic element is powerful, and which is always very delightful, is *The Ingénue*

Unless delicately drawn and sympathetically acted, there is danger in this style of "part" becoming insipid, which is fatal. It is so common a type that enumeration of any particular examples is unnecessary

The charge of being spiritless and vapid, is one not likely to be made against *The Chambermaids or Soubrettes;* their variety is as great as their popularity.

Another class of "part" that the restraints of modern life have almost banished, or altogether toned down, is that of *The Hoydens and Tomboys.* They are comprised in such characters as Jenny Wronghead ("Provoked Husband"), Miss Hoyden ("The Relapse"), and Miss Prue ("Love for Love"). As they all play upon the string called "violation of propriety" the amusement they yield will be easily understood. It was a character that at one time was in great favour.

One of the types that has changed its tone, though far from obsolete, is *The Romantic Young Lady* of the Lydia Languish school. She has become the "æsthetic" recently, and has shown herself as Fanny Bunter, or Lady Tompkins's daughter Olive, in "The Colonel." When well treated her "gush" is very diverting.

The Purely Shrewish Type, or that of the Virago, is an important, if not a pleasant one. Mrs. Pritchard and Mrs. Clive had a celebrity in this sort of "part," though their range extended successfully to many other characters.

The line of business in the theatre which was called "*First Old Women,*" was versatile and far-reaching. The designation is not a right one, and came into use from convenience. It would be absurd to call a woman old at forty, and yet some of the best "parts" belong-

ing to this category are no more. The Widow Warren ("Road to Ruin") and the Widow Green in "The Love Chase" are both of this age. Not a few of the most delightful recollections of the theatre are connected with these assumptions.

That Shakespeare knew the value of these characters and their hold on popularity, is clear from his wonderful pictures in Mrs. Quickly, and the Nurse in "Romeo and Juliet," not to speak of others of a more or less serious stamp.

What amusing and delightful examples we have in Mrs. Malaprop, Mrs. Candour, Mrs. Hardcastle and Mrs. Heidelberg, and in more recent times Lady Vavasour in "New Men and Old Acres," or, in a lower order, Mrs. Willoughby in "The Ticket of Leave Man." If some of them suggest the influence of Fielding and Smollett, or of Dickens in his Mrs. Gamps, Mrs. Lirripers or Mrs. Nicklebys, we are too grateful for the diversion they afford, to resent it. It will be a matter of regret if the stage should ever dispense with its old women.

Amusing dialogue has perhaps more often been the means of giving a temporary success to plays, than any other quality belonging to the practised play-wright. Temporary success possibly, is all that was looked for by either the manager or the author. Good dialogue alone, will not save a play that is weak in other respects. A considerable proportion of the playgoing public is well satisfied if it be entertained with plenty of good things in this way; but by far the greater number demands for its gratification, that in conjunction with these, there should, in character and construction, be something to interest. Amusing dialogue, by the actor's art, is often

made to appear very much better than it is. Half the charm of it is unquestionably due to the interpreter. Good dialogue, which of course can be amusing too, though to a superior sort of audience, owes its success to the same means; but there is this great difference, that the gifts or skill required for its being rendered effectively are infinitely rarer. There are hundreds of pieces made popular by amusing dialogue, and a certain amount of "go" and bustle, that fail to please a large section of theatre-goers, and cause them even to wonder at their success. The faculty of writing good, or what is called smart dialogue, easily, is a desirable one, but it must be supplemented by better wearing qualities. Very brilliant conceits, of which their author is not a little proud, are often by the inexorable clock doomed to banishment. Every dramatist of experience knows that good things, like good stories, are made or marred in the telling; their fate depending, as Lord Chesterfield said of the speaker's art, "more upon manner than matter." The finesse, subtlety, and tone, with which one artiste is able to give to an utterance a great value, is out of the reach of another. Anyone who has heard the good lines of a play as they were rendered by a clever company of actors in London, and afterwards suffered from their maltreatment by a second-rate touring company in the provinces, will realize my meaning. What charmed and gratified in the former case, offended and irritated in the latter.

Very elaborate conceits are out of place in the theatre. In comedy, *epigram* and *repartee* are its natural requirements. The accusation of rudeness in dialogue, which is made against authors, is sometimes due to the actors. Many things in the old comedies owed their

effect of brilliance, to the light, easy, graceful, good-tempered tone in the delivery. The very names are indicative of the key the scenes should be played in. In Congreve's "Double Dealer," Brisk says to Careless, "You're always spoiling company by leaving it;" to which his companion replies, "And thou art always spoiling company by coming into't." Brisk then goes on "Pshaw, man! when I say you spoil company by leaving it, I mean you leave nobody for the company to laugh at." Taken *au sérieux*, and with the lines delivered aggressively, what could be ruder?

Later on, the same characters are having a conversation on wit and humour.

Brisk: Well, then, you tell me some good jest, or very witty thing, laughing all the while as if you were ready to die—and I hear it, and look thus, would not you be disappointed?

Careless: No; for if it were a witty thing, I should not expect you to understand it.

It would not be easy to compute the number of plays in which lines such as these have done duty before and since the days of Congreve. Such raillery has always amused audiences, as it would do in real life.

The specimens given are anything but repartee of a high order, but when such dialogue is delivered with point and graceful good-humour, it never fails in its effect.

There are some very interesting remarks on Wit and Repartee, in a paper by Mr. Andrew Lang in *Harper's Magazine* for September last. It deals with the construction and dialogue of "Much Ado about Nothing," and will well repay the trouble of reference. Authors will require no caution about making their characters

uniformly too witty and brilliant. It is a charge that has been brought against Sheridan, Douglas Jerrold, and others. The valet and the coachman are declared to be as witty as their masters; but I think we may rest assured that an audience will only too readily make a virtue of this defect. What it will not forgive or condone, whether in the broadest farce or the most refined comedy, is dulness. Only authors, however, of the least experience or the commonest stamp, in place and out of place, drag in what they conceive to be wit, but which is in reality only smartness. Congreve's reputation was not made by such lines as those that I have quoted. Good things in a play are very delightful, but be sure that they *are* good things. It would require an elaborate essay on Wit and Humour, and the Causes of Laughter, to enter into this matter fully. It is in a sense unfortunate for the play-wright that the English language admits, more than any other, of such possibilities in the way of verbal contortions, word twisting and punning, and that our enjoyment in the theatre is so often dependent on such devices.

Dulness in comedy and comedy-drama, is not necessarily consequent on the want of this kind of cleverness and smartness, whether of a good or bad quality. It may arise from the author's inability to present his characters in a manner that interests while it amuses. It is really a lack of humorous perception. Dulness in dialogue may be due also to a property that has already been considered—condensation. If your characters must indulge in long speeches, see that they are not unnecessarily prolix.

The longest speech in "The School for Scandal" is

Sir Peter Teazle's opening one, "When an old bachelor marries a young wife," etc. It consists of—to be exact—194 words; but an examination of it will show that there is nothing that can be fairly dispensed with. It explains his situation and condition, the character and conduct of his wife, and the state of his feelings towards her. It is done with humour and point, and certainly is not answerable to the charge of dulness. But if we turn to the next longest speech, not as it is ever acted, but as Sheridan wrote it, it will at once be seen that it is quite unnecessary, and liable, therefore, to this serious accusation; for there is nothing humorous in it, in character or expression. It is Snake's speech in the first scene of the play, and is made up of 139 words. It conveys to the audience the position Sir Peter Teazle holds with regard to the two brothers, Joseph and Charles; with details of their dispositions, and various other matters that the audience learns elsewhere in the play just as clearly, and without the slightest risk of boredom.

This, it should be noticed, is also a valuable lesson in the very important art of "cutting." While on the subject, it may be interesting to the youthful dramatist to compare Sheridan's first drafts of his immortal comedy, with what is now the finished work. How Solomon Teazle, a widower who had had five children, and who talked with his butler of his wife's extravagance, developed into the Sir Peter with whom we are so familiar, etc., etc. The details are to be found in "The Life of Sheridan."

There are forms and tricks of dialogue that seem as if they would never weary, and must have been born

with the drama. What device can be more venerable than that which we now call *Malapropism*—the mispronunciation or wrong selection of words in a sentence? We laugh at the blunders of our servants in real life, and we laugh as heartily when similar errors are introduced into the dialogue of a stage-play. Shakespeare was familiar enough with it. He uses it in Mrs. Quickly, Dogberry, Bottom the Weaver, and other comic characters. It is amusing to find Mrs. Inchbald, herself a dramatist, in her preface to "The Rivals," getting indignant over Mrs. Malaprop. After blaming Sheridan for his extravagance, she says,—

"When future generations shall naturally suppose that an author of Mr. Sheridan's reputation drew men and women exactly as he found them, this sketch of a woman of family and fortune, at the end of the eighteenth century, will assure the said generations that the advance of female knowledge in Great Britain was far more tardy than in any other European nation."

It is not improbable that the generations alluded to, will make some allowance for the brilliant author laying on his colours with a lavish hand.

I have already enlarged on equivoke in situation, and it may be only necessary to remind the reader that its use and power in dialogue are not less. It is a quality that can hardly be dispensed with in witty and brilliant writing. It is curious to turn to some of the old comedies—of a century old or so—and glance at the dialogue. A great deal of it in those days, when sentiment was in fashion, was esteemed very highly, and with good acting brought great applause. It was full of bathos and terribly sententious. The scenes of Julia and Faulkland

in "The Rivals," are well-known instances. They demand some skill in presentment to avoid tediousness now. We get dialogue that is sententious in Goldsmith, too, but he could treat it as Sheridan could not. Peregrine in "John Bull," a play of George Colman the younger, is very much charged with it, and he holds forth with alarming effect.

"Genuine nature and unsophisticated morality, that turn disgusted from the rooted adepts in vice, have ever a reclaiming tear to shed on the children of error. Then let the sterner virtues, that allow no plea for human frailty, stalk on to Paradise without me. The mild associate of my journey thither shall be Charity; and my pilgrimage to the shrine of mercy will not, I trust, be worse performed for having aided the weak on my way who have stumbled in their progress."

Lieutenant Worthington also in "The Poor Gentleman" is much given to this kind of thing, or rather it is given to him. Characters with dialogue of a similar nature were often introduced for the sake of providing the "leading man," whose tendencies were somewhat serious, with a "part" which at one time was very attractive. The best and most amusing dialogue is that which comes from the characters with appropriateness, and expresses the humours of the type. Among dramatists Goldsmith is very amusing. There is something extremely droll in the long-faced melancholy Croaker's speech to Honeywood: "People think, indeed, because they see me come out in a morning thus, with a pleasant face, and to make my friends merry, that all's well within," etc., and further on, where he speaks of Dick Doleful, who has committed suicide: "Ah,

there was merit neglected for you! And so true a friend; we loved each other for thirty years, and yet he never asked me to lend him a single farthing." Croaker's invitation to the young people to a little pleasure party, is also very good. He asks them to go with him to see "Old Ruggins, the curry-comb maker, lying in state." As he was an intimate of Croaker's, he thinks "these are friendly things we ought to do for each other."

There is philosphy as well as humour in the following: "And yet I don't think it afflicts me so much as one might think. There's the advantage of fretting away our misfortunes beforehand, we never feel them when they come."

Douglas Jerrold was a master of brilliant dialogue. His "Bubbles of the Day," though by no means satisfactory as a play, is full of good things. The comedy is too unrelievedly sarcastic, and lacks the touch of humanity. The impression conveyed is, that no one is really in earnest. Notwithstanding a powerful cast, it did not succeed. Jerrold could have made it permanently attractive, but I daresay wrote for his company. Here are a few of the clever things. The play abounds in cynical people.

Captain Smoke: An extraordinary woman, have you read her last book, sir?

Skindeep (*aside*): I should like to read her last book with all my soul.

Melon's remark that "in this world purses are the arteries of life, as they are full or empty, we are men or carcasses" is true enough from him, though fortunately not of us all.

Smoke and Melon are talking together, and a violent knocking at the street door is heard.

Smoke : That's Malmsey Shark.

Melon ; How do you know?

Smoke : From this fact : no metal ever falls into his hands that he doesn't make the most of.

Again.

Skindeep : Ha! you are fortune's child, captain.

Smoke : It's plain then the lady's ashamed of her son ; for as yet she's never owned me.

A characteristic line of another of the *dramatis personæ* (Spreadweasel) is good : "I know when I courted I took lawyer's advice, and signed every letter to my love, 'Yours without prejudice.'"

These are witty lines that would tell with as much effect in the acting to-day, as they did nearly fifty years ago. But they do not represent Jerrold in his best phases. His dialogue is not wholly cynical nor are his characters all given to sneering ; he had a sympathy with what was noblest and best in the shifting scenes of life. There is no modern writer who can more justly lay claim to the possession of a literary quality in his plays. He was successful in his time as the producer of good and pure English drama, and the best proof of his merit —if such a thing be necessary—is that by mere extracts from his works we can realize the rare quality of a wisdom that is lighted by the flame of a playful wit. Bulwer, in his plays that were not professedly poetical, has some admirable dialogue. The high-flown speeches of his heroes and heroines are as a rule dreadfully rhetorical and florid ; but he is thoroughly at home with the talk of characters in which cynicism is allow

able. His men of the world are rendered with much skill, and he does not lose sight of refinement and distinction. Very good things are to be found in the comedy he wrote for "The Guild of Literature and Art," called "Not so Bad as We Seem," played by a company comprising some of the greatest names in Literature and Art, at Devonshire House in 1851, before her Majesty and the late Prince Consort.

There have been myriads of writers for the modern stage whose success in dialogue has been beyond dispute. Some of it so good, as to lead to the regret that it should be utilized for ephemeral productions. It is beyond the scope of this work to treat of the many living authors who are capable of producing good dialogue. Their work can best be studied in the theatre itself. Among writers whose plays have been seen more recently, and who are not living, the late Henry J. Byron was in great favour with some managers as a writer of effective dialogue. Unfortunately his facility for all sorts of possible and impossible word twisting and punning, led him astray. Although an intelligent audience is moved to laughter by the absurdest and most inane things, it is doubtful whether it is not at the same time conscious of losing a certain amount of self-respect. The quantity of Byron's work seems to have injured its quality. He had a power of invention, a sense of humour and pathos, with real geniality, and a manliness and wholsomeness in tone, that should have been able to render his plays acceptable to a much higher class intellectually, than that for which he catered with such success. He could write, and did, some very admirable dialogue; but it is not improbable that his talent for writing rapidly and

impulsively was the means of his best things becoming lost, or smothered, by very inferior conceits and jokes. His contemporary and fellow-dramatist, the author of "Two Roses," though wanting in the constructiveness that was Byron's, was eminently good in some of his dialogue. The play just mentioned is full of good things. Its author had poetical perceptions, and a tendency to the idyllic and pastoral, that enabled him to imbue his talk with many graceful and charming fancies. They covered his deficiencies in what has been called Harmony and Ethical Balance. There are many playgoers in whose memories will be fresh, some of the delightful dialogue contained in "Apple Blossoms," "Forgiven," "Tweedie's Rights" and other plays. His attempt in the poetic drama in the play of "Oriana," deserves recognition, though it was not able to command any success. This was due in part to treatment. His greatly popular "Two Roses" well represents him. It contains in dialogue, delicate humour, poetry and the charm of true sympathy. T. W. Robertson, whose influence on Albery was said to be powerful, was not wanting in suggestions of the poetical and idyllic, and his taste was purer than the author of "Two Roses." His dialogue, if not very witty, has humour and appropriateness, with a quick sense of the satirical. His gifts also enabled him to give opportunities for finesse, which his original exponents did full justice to. Nor was he wanting in qualities that added value and weight to some of his lines. The advice which Sam Gerridge offers on the ever-recurring question of capital and labour, and the illustrations of them by Eccles, are of as much regard and interest now as they ever were.

Here and there we meet with dialogue that is admirable. Polly's reproach to Sam: "You never go and kill Sepoys," and his reply: "No, I pay rates and taxes." Gerridge's remark too, after witnessing the delight of the Marquise on seeing her son again, is excellent: "Well, there's always some good in women even when they're ladies!"

There is very amusing and satirical dialogue in the "Owl's Roost" scene in "Society," and also in the popular plays of "Ours" and "School." He gave too, to some of his womanly characters a charm, from a sort of *naïveté*, that was far superior to what was usual with the ordinary type of *ingénues*. Equivoke he did not make a very great use of, and yet his adaptations from Augier, Sardou, etc., must have shown him its value. A favourite device of Robertson's was that of two couples carrying on a dialogue side by side, so as to give point to their separate utterances; a cross-firing arrangement that in moderation was effective and amusing.

It says much for a writer that he does not err against the accepted canons of good taste, which in stage matters is all important. The author of "Caste," and those who encouraged and helped him, deserve the gratitude of play-goers for this, as well as for the other delightful qualities to which attention has been drawn.

CHAPTER VI.

PRACTICAL HINTS AND AN ANALYSIS.

SUPPOSING that the tyro has to some extent digested the details given in the chapters dealing with the "Qualities Required," and the "Mechanism of a Play," and moreover is conscious of the possession of that subtle dramatic sense or instinct, he may naturally ask for certain advice of a more practical nature. "I would write a play," he may assert, "and am desirous of benefiting by such remarks as you have made;" or, "I have written a play, and if it does not fulfil all the conditions laid down, it seems to me free of such errors as are held to be fatal to success. I am willing to submit it to any competent manager, and be guided by his advice and experience; but I should like to know something of the customs of the theatre, what terms are paid, what class of piece pays best, whether "costume" plays or "modern" plays are more acceptable, the number of characters it is desirable a drama should contain, what length a piece should be, how, in short, I can best meet the various exigencies that will arise." To such queries, in the fullest way, experience alone can furnish the reply, and rigid rules would be as difficult to follow as to supply. As an old Bedfordshire lady I know of, used to say, "In diff'runt plairzen, they 'ev diff'runt wairzen" (places and ways). The customs, terms, and

conditions, vary with the theatre and its management. Should a young author, whose work has merit, succeed in getting it accepted at any of our best theatres, and he is amenable to the suggestions and advice of the management and the artistes engaged, he is pretty sure of fair and liberal treatment. With theatres whose management is in any respect doubtful, he had better not have anything to do. The question as to what class of dramatic work pays best, is an important one. The habits of the British public in the matter of its entertainments, have been compared, not inaptly, to the capricious vagaries of fish as experienced by the angler. There are periods when the most tempting baits fail to bring them to the managerial hook. They will reject at one time, what they will eagerly swallow at another. A clue to the difficulty may be supplied when it is realized, that people go to the theatre to see the actors, as much, or more than they do to see the play. "Modern" pieces, as they are generally termed, or pieces that are supposed to reflect the tone and fashion of the day, have, as a rule, the greatest interest for the playgoer. The number of "parts" it is desirable that a play should contain, must of course depend on its length and character, these being previously determined by the "motif."

Again, a young author says: "I have an idea or a 'motif' that I think will give rise to a 'situation' of beauty, power or effect. How can I best present this so as to bring it within the compass of an artistic production, and render it also a marketable commodity?"

Farcical comedy has been much in demand, and when successful has largely benefited pecuniarily both the manager and the author; but it would be childish to

say to a novice to whom has occurred some pathetic or powerful situation, "Work it up into a farcical comedy." Such errors are by no means infrequent. Keeping in view what has been previously said on Harmony will be useful here. Is your idea best suited to drama, melodrama, comedy, or farce? It cannot be denied that some plays contain elements that are in keeping with each and all of these, but let the beginner adhere to the main "motif," for that must decide the style of the play. An original, or a first scheme, may grow and develop, but the tyro will be wise to try as an initial effort, to produce a one-act play from the simple idea, without further involvement, or a new accession of material. All that is vital can often be found in one act. Almost without exception our successful play-wrights have tried their "prentice han'" on dramas of this kind; and as much art can be shown as in the longest efforts. There is less risk also to a manager in giving a short play a trial. There are managers who do not know good work from bad. There are those who are fully alive to the merits of good work, but who give little encouragement to it. Others not only know what good work is, but welcome it heartily, for in a short piece may be discovered the germ of future excellence. But a young author must not rely on its yielding him any considerable pecuniary results. One and two-act plays are not now as a rule in demand. The *pièce de résistance* is what the manager looks to for drawing money, and the *lever du rideau* (French terms are unavoidable), with rare exceptions, brings nothing appreciable to the treasury. "Curtain raisers," but for the display of the talents of some given artiste, are not made a feature of.

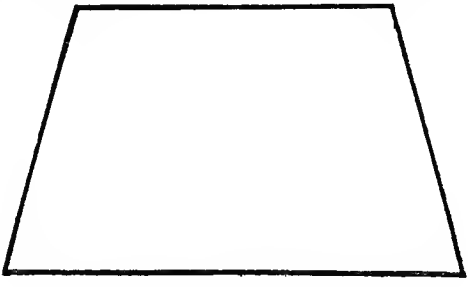
There are numberless short pieces that would be, with a little revision, as full of charm now as the day they were written, that a manager can select from and legally put upon the boards of his theatre, for which he need not pay a penny. The gain is on the side of the novice should he be fortunate enough to get his little play acted. He obtains instant advertisement, and, better still, the experience that comes from having his work presented. Nothing will so truly show him what effect on the stage actually is. Always let it be remembered that many short plays require the highest skill in the acting. The more graceful and delicate the play, the more artistic must be its rendering.

Seeing that there is little demand for short pieces, it may seem that, supposing you have succeeded in constructing one which is attractive and artistic, its chances of getting put upon the stage by a manager are rather slight. Good acting, it has been remarked before, is an incentive to good play-making. The converse also holds good, and if you can supply anything that shall fit the idiosyncrasies of a manager who is an ambitious actor, there may be your opportunity. You have not only to convince him that the acting of your little play will advance his reputation, but also beget in him a liking for the part you would have him act. Without some personal influence, or introduction, these may be difficulties. Your greatest chance of acceptance lies in producing something of striking merit or originality, though it is possible that, if you should happen to meet his wants in a timely way, you may get your opportunity under less exacting conditions. If your work is good enough to play, it is good enough to pay for, and any

honourable manager would give you a weekly or nightly royalty on your piece, or even buy it outright.

Artistes, too, who are not managers, are always wanting a vehicle for their talents, and if you can get any clever actor or actress to take an interest in your production, it may be the means of gaining the public ear and eye. But the greatest and most solid compensation that you can look to obtain, for having succeeded in producing sound work in short form, is in what the effort will have taught you of the difficulties of dramatic construction; and the experience it will have yielded for future labours. It is reasonable to assume that if a young author cannot master a short play, there is little likelihood of his conquering the difficulties of one in three or four acts.

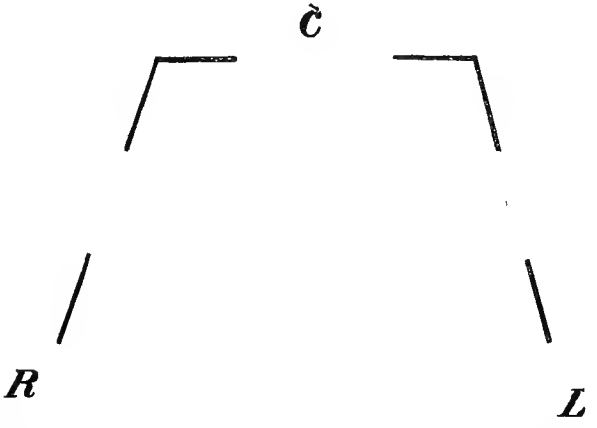
We will suppose, then, that a young author is in possession of a "motif," or an idea, and that he has fixed upon the period and locality he thinks most suitable to its development. Let it be assumed that he has some skill in the production of dialogue, and that he is not unmindful of the importance in the theatre, of point, epigram, or repartee. Further that he realizes that what he is to carry out must be done by a



certain number of puppets, we will call them, on a surface or a slightly inclined plane, enclosed by a form which comes within the description of what "every schoolboy" (always ahead of his elders) knows is a trapezium.

This wooden surface may with the aid of painted canvas, and certain supports, represent the sea-shore, a landscape, a garden, a forest, a palace, a cottage, a prison, an attic, a drawing-room, or indeed any spot on the earth, above the earth, or below it. In whatever way this plane is enclosed by plaster, or wood, or canvas, painted, gilded or decorated, it will not materially alter its condition so far as it primally concerns the maker of the play. It may be laid with costly carpets, or covered with painted "cloths." Curiosity shops and furniture dealers may supply material to absorb its space. It may by skilful lighting be made into a picture of extreme beauty, or it may be so tastelessly fitted, garnished, and enclosed, as to completely offend the artistic sense. But, however treated, it is still the same wooden surface or stage, on which your set of puppets is to be displayed, and on which they are to disport themselves. Gifted and graceful interpreters, with the instincts of expressing what is beautiful or truthful, may afterwards endow those phantom dolls with a life and reality, startling to you, their supposed creator, but they must first be regarded as mere puppets or pieces to play with. Represent them, if you will, by discs of wood or cardboard; for with whatever perspicuity the characters may exist for you, it will be well to hold to the idea of their being moved about in the manner of these counters. The

more tangibly they are realized to you, the more truly you will be able to understand how they act and react upon each other, in absolute representation. With the above plan, and your discs or puppets before you, proceed to construct your scenario. It must be assumed that, what I have called in the fourth chapter the "story," or the set of conditions supposed to exist before the play begins, is clear to your mental vision. It is possible your play may contain but a couple of characters. In such a case your puppets should give you little trouble as to their movements, entrances, exits and so forth. The simpler your scene is, the better, and an interior with three sets of doors or entrances, as indicated here, has served for thousands of admirable plays.



The exact situation of the doors, and other details, the stage-manager will arrange, should your piece be

acted; but some study of these plans may save him much after labour, and is essential to every maker of plays. The shortest piece should be first put into scenario form. An author is thus enabled to see at an early period, what is improbable in motive and movement. The full scenario of a more important drama, a play in three or four acts, should, in addition to the plan of the scenes, with doors, windows, trees, buildings, etc., duly marked, contain a list of the characters, their ages and their *status*. The types should be expressed or hinted at, for it is necessary that they or their *equivalents* should be clear enough in their respective motives. Then should come in outline, a description of what details of the "story" and plot are expressed by each character as it comes on the stage.

As a play is a world, with opposing passions and conflicts of its own, it will be requisite that as soon as possible, the motives and interests with which the characters start should be shown: what, in short, they would "be at." They should all, as in real life, have, as Hamlet says, "business and desire."[1]

In every well made play there should be no character that is not really necessary. A violation of this rule is brought about very frequently in writing for a special company. The entrance and exit of every character should not only be marked, but some reason should be given for its leaving the stage. Particulars should be noted of preparation for any scenes of practical equivoke, or of anything with an important bearing on a future

[1] In the Analysis given at the end of this chapter, it will be seen that the principal motives of all the characters are declared before the second act is over.

"situation." There is no harm in jotting down the rough "dialogue" of some portions of the play. In fact the more fully the scenario is written, the easier it will be for an expert to determine the chances of its value. The Analysis would be a scenario in full, if the stage plans were included.

It may be easily conceived, that the more acts a play is divided into, the more difficult is the scenario, and in no form of composition does it present such difficulties as in the domain of pure comedy. But even in many one-act plays there is an amount of equivoke and involvement that will surprise those who think the making of a short play is a trivial matter. It may seem unnecessary to state that, if any of your characters, on leaving the stage, are required to change their costume, they should be allowed reasonable time to do so. The want of attention to such an apparently simple matter, is common with many whose gifts would not imply such thoughtlessness. The desirability of giving rest to your actors, is a contingency which will not present itself in a one-act play, though its necessity in a long drama will be easily comprehended, if it be borne in mind that actors are flesh and blood. Hamlet and Othello require intervals of repose, which Shakespeare has not failed to supply them with. It may be well too, to let your personages have a gradation as to length—always bearing in mind that length is not value. Some of the most effective "parts" known to the theatre, can be written on an open sheet of note paper.

Having mastered the scenario, or rather, by constant writings and re-writings, got it into such a condition as

will enable you safely to come to the termination, submit it to some intelligent friend. If he be a playgoer of experience, and he reports well of it, clothe the framework with words, not losing sight of the suggestions made in the chapter on "Types of Character and Dialogue." Then you may bring it under the notice of an actor or a manager, who will perhaps be able to tell you in ten minutes how far it is actable or attractive. While clothing the framework, bear in mind the necessity of keeping within certain limits. You may be tempted by the opportunities which ingenuity may suggest, to elaborate your play and make it exceed the one act, but do not be induced to try the "hammering out" process. Many single "situations" are so good or powerful, as to admit of a three-act or a four-act play being built up to them, and are often so treated by competent dramatists, but such pieces would not be good exemplars for the tyro.

Let us see if we can arrive at anything definite with regard to length. The phrase in the theatre is not, "How many pages does the piece contain?" but "How long does it play?" If we take the clever little adaptation called "A Sheep in Wolf's Clothing" (by Tom Taylor, from Madame de Girardin's "Une Femme qui déteste son Mari") which acts about an hour, we shall find, that without counting the "business," etc., it contains something like 8700 words, that is to say, it takes up as nearly as possible thirty-two pages in Mr. French's ordinary acting edition. It is a little drama of the domestic type; the period that of the Monmouth rebellion and Judge Jefferies. Its elements are strong and pathetic. There is no

speech in it longer than fifteen or sixteen lines, but elaborated in the acting, it might play another ten minutes or quarter of an hour—too long for an ordinary one-act piece. The length of a play as usually calculated for the stage, is in short determined by the "time" it is taken in. Should it happen that your play is comedy, or in the tone of comedy, similar we will say to Charles Mathews's charming little piece "The Dowager," it will be necessary to play it much more rapidly. To fill an hour, therefore, a play of this description, unless there should be something exceptionally time-taking in the "business," will require more words. The quick, bright delivery, essential to the tone of real comedy acting, will naturally absorb the "dialogue" more rapidly. Aim at a play occupying half an hour or forty minutes; the rule being that all plays expand in stage treatment. Whatever allowance is made for "business," or pauses in the acting, there are few dramatic authors who are able at once to meet stage requirements as to time. Perhaps the better course is first to write fully, and afterwards ruthlessly cut down. Brevity and conciseness on the stage before all things. Tom Taylor always wrote first with fulness, and afterwards abridged. An author quickly learns the necessity for condensation, when he comes into contact with the manager, stage-manager and company belonging to, or engaged in the theatre. Let there be no padding or fine writing for its own sake. Action and development of the scheme must be the first considerations. Deal with your theme pertinently and to the point. See what Buckstone—a clever play-wright as well as actor—could do (in twenty

pages, with five or six characters and a cottage interior) and look at that capital little play "Good for Nothing." Study some of the admirable little adaptations and original plays of such writers as Poole, the Dances, Selby, Bayle Bernard, Mark Lemon, A'Beckett, Planché, the Broughs, Charles Mathews, G. H. Lewes, Halliday and others, and you will soon learn what is effective and delightful in the theatre. Many of these productions will naturally read old-fashioned and seem out of date now, but it is because they are plays, and not merely stage conversations devoid of action and incident, that they are practically useful to the student: for whether in fashion or out of it, they have with the actor's co-operation the power to engross and interest men and women of all ages, and touch with no uncertain hand the springs of laughter and of tears. If "bookish theoric" is to help a candidate for dramatic honours, it is only by such means success is to be achieved.

It is a matter for considerable regret that there is no market now for pieces which exceed in length the one-act play, but whose material does not allow of their extension to such a number of acts as would make the principal entertainment of the evening. They were generally two-act pieces, playing from seventy minutes to two hours, or under. Among them, may be found admirable instances of the art of the play-wright. It is rare now to see on the English stage, pieces, original or adapted, like "The Housekeeper," "The Rent Day," "Time Tries All," "Not a Bad Judge," "Secret Service," "Our Wife," "A Wonderful Woman," "The Poor Nobleman" or, "The Porter's Knot," to take a few at random.

In respect to the length of plays in three or four acts, the division now most favoured, it may be observed that the general rule is, to get the evening's entertainment well within three hours. Half-past eight, or even nine, is often the time of commencing. The conveniences of modern life, too, seem to demand that audiences should not be kept in the theatre much later than eleven o'clock. Two hours and a half will thoroughly satisfy, if the quality of the entertainment be good. Spectacular plays, as a rule, are longer, but there is a tendency even with these, to bring them within shorter limits. It is obvious that if we take into consideration "waits" between the acts, ten minutes' interval after the first, second, and third acts of a four-act play will occupy half an hour; a consideration to the dramatist. If the "sets" are not heavy, time can be saved to a great extent. It is wonderful what is accomplished now in quickness of change, by the stage-carpenters and scene-shifters, over the most elaborate productions. With some managers one "set" for an act seems to be held an indispensable condition; but it is questionable whether the gain derived from compactness, and finish, mechanically, is not more than counterbalanced, in checking what is constructive in the making of a play. Tableau curtains are resorted to, but whether the old system, when well carried out, of the scenes being changed in sight, is not the better plan, may be doubted. The tyro, notwithstanding, will be wiser to study the conditions of the time. Science may have in store such achievements in this direction as at present are undreamed of.

I conclude this chapter with the promised Analysis.

It is an analysis of the four-act comedy, or comedy-drama, "The Favourite of Fortune," by my late lamented friend, Dr. Westland Marston.[2] I have selected it on account of its admirable construction, and as a good example of a tested play of the comparatively modern style, although first produced five and twenty years ago. The pivot, or "motif," black-mailing, is as old as the hills, and it is probable will continue to be a property of the dramatist and story-teller as long as their vocation exists, and human nature remains what it is. The play was produced by E. A. Sothern—the creator of Lord Dundreary—though the "part" he played in it has no elements of caricature. The character assumed by the manager, Buckstone, was not of that kind either usually associated with his talents. The *Times* critique, presumably by John Oxenford, was as follows: "It is not too much to say that the new piece is one of the most important additions to the stock of English prose comedy that has been made during the present century."

The play was last seen in London at a matinée at Terry's Theatre, November, 1887, when the "Dramatic Students" gracefully presented it for the benefit of its author. Criticisms on this revival rendered tribute to the soundness of the play's construction, its interesting, healthy, and sympathetic plot, the grace and refinement of its style, and its perfect freedom from coarseness of repartee, or vulgarity. It is questionable

[2] I am indebted to Messrs. Chatto and Windus, who published the play in 1876, and to Dr. Marston's executors for their kind permission to make this analysis.

whether the villain of the play is not rather lightly let off, but comedy often does not lend itself to more than the complete discomfiture of the evil genius. The time occupied in the performance would depend on the acting of the more serious scenes. From two hours and a half to two hours and three quarters might be the limit. Each scene remains for the act, so there is no change till the drop descends. The original London cast may have an interest for old play-goers; though the play was first tried at Glasgow.

THE FAVOURITE OF FORTUNE.

First represented at the
THEATRE ROYAL, HAYMARKET,
On Easter Monday, 1866.

CHARACTERS:

Frank Annerly	*Who has lately come into a large fortune*	Mr. SOTHERN.
Tom Sutherland		Mr. BUCKSTONE.
Major Price		Mr. ROGERS.
Mr. Fox Bromley		Mr. CHIPPENDALE.
Mrs. Lorrington	(*A wealthy widow*)	Mrs. CHIPPENDALE.
Hester Lorrington	*Her daughters*	Miss KATE SAVILLE.
Lucy Lorrington		Miss NELLY MOORE.
Mrs. Witherby		Mrs. E. FITZWILLIAM.
Euphemia Witherby	*Her daughter, a nervous young lady.*	Miss CAROLINE HILL.
Camilla Price	*Niece to the Major*	Miss H. LINDLEY.

Sailors, Sailors' Wives, Servants, etc., etc.

SCENE: *Mrs. Lorrington's Marine Villa and Grounds in the Isle of Wight.*

Time 1866.

SHOWING THE DISTRIBUTION OF SYMPATHY AMONG THE CHARACTERS.

*8. Frank Annerly 7. Tom Sutherland 4. Hester 5. Lucy 10. Euphemia	*Sympathetic Characters*	That is, those whose interests, hopes, etc., are watched with sympathy by the audience.
2. Mrs. Lorrington	*Sympathetic, but with elements or motives leading to conflict in the play.* All characters should contribute to conflict, but this one is an important factor, as from vanity, want of moral courage, etc., it crosses the success or happiness of those the audience is manifestly in sympathy with.	
6. Fox Bromley	*The "villain" of the play, or most important evil influence.*	
3 Mrs. Witherby 1. Major Price 9. Camilla	*Opposing Characters*	Or the reverse of sympathetic.

ACT I.

SCENE.—*An elegantly furnished apartment.*

[*Enter* MRS. WITHERBY and MAJOR PRICE.]

Introduction and relative positions of the characters conveyed in pointed dialogue, and lines of the plot being laid down.

The play opens with a dialogue between Mrs. Witherby and Major Price, telling the audience whose house they are in, what manner of woman their hostess is, and why they are staying there. The Major says that he was introduced to the hostess, Mrs. Lorrington, by his old friend Sir Richard Sutherland, who is the father of Tom Suther-

* The numbers affixed to the characters, indicate the order in which their motives or interests are shown to the audience.

land. The latter arrived the previous evening with his friend Frank Annerly, the "leading part" or hero of the play. Mrs. Lorrington invited Frank Annerly as a friend of Tom Sutherland's. Sir Richard Sutherland, who had settled in Hampshire, having been a good deal embarrassed some years back, borrowed a large sum of money from Mrs. Lorrington on mortgage of part of his property. That sum he finds it inconvenient to repay. He consents that Tom Sutherland, his nephew and heir, shall marry her daughter Lucy, and she agrees that the mortgage shall be transferred to Lucy on her wedding day, the property thus remaining in the family. Mrs. Witherby had met Mrs. Lorrington the previous summer at Spa, and confesses that Mrs. Lorrington, as a wealthy woman, is convenient to her, though she has never been able to learn anything of her (Mrs. Lorrington's) relations. Mrs. Witherby, who is a widow, has a daughter, Euphemia or Effie, staying in the house with her.

The Major had met Mrs. Lorrington at her home in Hampshire, and having found she had a good cook, capital quarters for shooting, fishing, etc., thought it to his interest to keep up the acquaintance. He has a marriageable niece with him (Camilla Price). Mrs. Lorrington is anxious to get into Society, and believes these two visitors can help her to do so, and make her *au fait* with social usages, etc.

Motive or interest of first character shown.

Mrs. Lorrington comes on [*Enter* MRS. LORRINGTON], and the audience is shown at once how Mrs. Witherby and the Major laugh in their sleeves at her

Audience amused by the way in which the homely but vain hostess is played upon by her guests.

ignorance. It sees also how Mrs. Lorrington is anxious for her daughter Lucy to marry Tom Sutherland (who is quite dependent on his uncle). Mrs. Lorrington speaks of Frank Annerly's visit. Mrs. Witherby, *aside,* suggests the possibility of Mrs. Lorrington's meaning him for her (Mrs. L.'s) other daughter, Hester, and says (*also aside*) that she must not forget her own daughter Effie, as she knows Annerly to be one of the richest and best connected men in Hampshire. She suspects, too, that the Major may have an eye to Annerly for his nicce. The Major intimates that he has letters to write and must leave them. [*Exit* MAJOR.] Dialogue, developing characters, showing Mrs. Witherby's worldliness and Mrs. Lorrington's simplicity and kind-heartedness.

Motive of second character.

Motive of third character.

Mrs. Witherby says she is to be at Lady Dobson's at three o'clock and must go and dress. [*Exit* MRS. WITHERBY.]

Gradual development of plot.

A short soliloquy by Mrs. Lorrington, then enter her daughters Hester and Lucy [*Enter* HESTER and LUCY], who at once tell their mother they have been out collecting money for the families of some poor fishermen who were drowned the previous week. Lucy says that Hester has lost her heart to a mysterious stranger—a gentleman—who saved many of the lives of the poor fellows who were in danger. It was at midnight, and, having wrapped his coat round a lad who

Motive or interest of fourth character.

had been rescued, he went away without leaving a trace of his whereabouts.

Mrs. Lorrington chides her daughters for not having joined the riding party, particularly Lucy, whom she wishes to "make her way" with Tom Sutherland. Some amusing dialogue follows in which Lucy denies that Tom is "anything to her." Her mother reminds her that she did not dislike Tom Sutherland before he went abroad. Lucy says, "No, I wasn't consigned to him then, like a bale of goods." She consoles herself by saying, further, that he may not propose to her.

Motive or interests of fifth character.

Mrs. Lorrington then turns to Hester and reminds her of the suitors that *she* has rejected, and shows her a letter she holds in her hand, which Hester had given her. It is from one of them—a Mr. Paul Gresham—who has written renewing his proposals. She then calls Hester's attention to Annerly, who combines fortune with family. Hester and Lucy ridicule Annerly's indolent and cynical manner. Mrs. Lorrington reminds them what court Mrs. Witherby pays him. Hester says, "Yes, she has a daughter to marry, but you were never meant for a fashionable mother—to hold an auction in your drawing-room and knock down your daughters with your fan." At this moment Lucy, looking from the window, sees her mother's friend, Fox Bromley, walking down the beach. Mrs. Lorrington shows her alarm at once, and the audience sees that there is some mystery connected

Audience learns there is a "mystery."

First allusion to the motive and interests of sixth character, or "evil influence" of the play.

with him. She goes off hurriedly. [*Exit* MRS. LORRINGTON.]

Audience at once prepared to sympathize with hero.

Hester shows that Bromley is also a puzzle to her, as, though her mother speaks of him as her best friend, he never appears without making her miserable. Lucy now observes Tom Sutherland from the window, and is anxious to hurry away. She tells Hester she would as soon "go to gaol as marry on compulsion," a sentiment her sister thoroughly agrees with. Lucy then teases her about the romantic incident of the stranger who saved the fisherman, and they go off laughing, Hester not at all displeased. [*Exeunt* HESTER *and* LUCY.] As soon as they have left by the door, Tom Sutherland comes on by the window [*Enter* TOM SUTHERLAND], and in a few lines shows that though Annerly is apparently *blasé* he is in reality the best of fellows.

Lines of the plot still being laid down.

Annerly (the hero) now comes on [*Enter* ANNERLY]—they have both been riding—and Tom thanks him for having promised a living that is in Annerly's gift to an old tutor of Tom Sutherland's, whom he calls Dominie Sampson, as he is such a book-worm. Tom, on the tour with Annerly, had taken him (Annerly) to a little town in the Pyrenees, where the old tutor was living in a very hopeless state as to his prospects.

Plot progressing steadily, and continued in dialogue with point and conciseness.

They then talk of Lucy. Tom says he had a slight liking for her before he went abroad, but that he finds he does not care for her now; besides hating the idea of being

Interest and motives of seventh character.

"driven into marriage." His uncle, for his own interest, is bent on it, and as Tom is dependent on him for money, he is in a ticklish position. He determines, therefore, to go in for tactics. Tom points out to Annerly what a lucky fellow he is with "health, wealth, and position," to be so envied and flattered. Annerly contends that it is his £20,000 a year that are flattered. He tells Tom that he never expected to come in for such a property. Annerly's fortune, in the shape of entailed estates, he inherited from his cousin George Annerly. George had a brother, a scapegrace, Captain Annerly, who was estranged from his family. He was killed in New Zealand in a skirmish with the rebels, his death being heard of only through the War Office. He died one year only before George Annerly. Had he survived he would have been heir-at-law. Annerly then tells Tom that he was once "fool enough to fall in love with a girl." The girl and her parents knew that Annerly's bachelor cousin George was not expected to recover from an illness he was suffering from. Failing children, Frank Annerly was his heir. His engagement to the girl was acceded to and encouraged by the parents. Suddenly George Annerly rallied and resolved to marry. Had he done so, the fortune would have gone to his children.

Eighth character, or hero, at first somewhat motiveless, but atonement fully made later on.

Lines of plot and development of character.

Annerly mentioned George's proposed marriage one morning to his "intended." The next day, on calling, he found that the girl and her parents were "not at home" to him. He was jilted, in fact, and saw her no more.

He takes this girl as a type of womankind, and is therefore cynical and mistrustful. His cousin, George Annerly, did *not* marry after all, and Frank inherited the whole of his fortune. He tells Tom that the ladies will soon be back. In his own words: "Mark the part I shall play, and you will find that an impertinent fellow may be admired for his humour, a fool for his wit, a fop for his manliness, and a cynic for his good-nature; provided he be also a Favourite of Fortune.

[*Enter* MRS. WITHERBY, EFFIE, CAMILLA, MAJOR, MRS. LORRINGTON, HESTER.] The other characters enter to wait till the carriage comes round, as they are most of them going to Lady Dobson's.

Five or six pages developing character in pointed and witty dialogue.

The next five or six pages consist of dialogue full of point and epigram, between Annerly and members of the party assembled. He adopts a cynical and detracting tone. Mrs. Witherby tries to push forward her daughter (a shy simpleton, as her mother calls her) with Annerly; as also the Major his niece, Camilla. There are good lines in which Hester hits Annerly satirically. Mrs. Witherby scandalizes Lady Dobson. Annerly takes her (Mrs. Witherby's) tone, though he has never seen Lady Dobson. Hester retires up the stage displeased at their back-biting, having just spoken earnestly to Annerly about maligning Lady Dobson.

Motive and interests of ninth character.

Hero suddenly wakes up, and a love interest is developed and closely watched by audience.

The carriage is announced, and Mrs. Witherby, Effie, Camilla, and the Major go off. [*Exeunt* MRS. WITHERBY, EFFIE, CAMILLA, MAJOR.] [Mrs. Lorrington

and Tom are up the stage.] Hester is about to follow them, when Annerly detains her, changing his tone entirely, and thanking her earnestly for her deserved reproofs. Hester again speaks out frankly, and at this, Mrs. Lorrington comes down, and apologizes to him for what she calls "Hester's unpolished demeanour." She (Mrs. Lorrington) asks Annerly if he will take a walk on the beach with her. Tom sees that Annerly wants the mother "out of the way," and asks to have a word with her. Mrs. Lorrington, thinking Tom wants to talk with her about Lucy, assents at once, and they go off together. [*Exeunt* MRS. LORRINGTON *and* TOM.]

Interest of the lovers watched. Love interest and equivoke. Sense of advancing time, and instinct of approaching "situation."

Hester and Annerly are now alone on the stage. Annerly begs for a moment with her. His manner impresses her as strange. "Just now," she replies, "moments with me are precious." "Moments with you are indeed so," is Annerly's response. She informs him that she is busy collecting money for the fishermen's families. She will stay, however, if he will pay her a guinea for every minute. He consents, and she takes out her watch and tablets. She tells him that some of the poor men were saved by the exertions of a brave young fellow, who, though he had the appearance of a modern gentleman, had, nevertheless, a heart in his bosom. Annerly asks her if she admires this young fellow. "Yes," she says warmly; "do you?" "Yes —yes"—he answers hesitatingly, "in moderation." She deprecates ironically his coldness and "moderation." Annerly tells her that though it may seem strange to her, he does really feel an interest in him.

Voices are now heard on the terrace outside. "We want to see Mr. Annerly! We must thank the gentleman!"

Heroine's surprise on receiving explanation, watched with interest by audience, and coming effect. Love interest thoroughly started and effect or "situation" to finish the act briskly.

Tom Sutherland hurries on [*Enter* TOM] and says, "I can keep your secret no longer, Annerly!" He tells him rapidly that in the pocket of the coat he wrapped round the lad, a letter was found with his name on it, that the sailors have tracked him, and are coming in person to thank him. "What!" exclaims Hester, "you don't mean to say that Mr. Annerly—." "I mean," interrupts Tom, "that Annerly is the man to whose efforts half a dozen honest fellows owe their lives!" "And this happened?" asks Hester. "In last week's gale, a few nights before we came here." "Mr. Annerly," she pleads, can you forgive me?" "Forgive you!" says Annerly warmly, then *aside*, "Now if that girl marries anyone else, I shall die a bachelor!"

The voices are heard again, and as the sailors, women, and children troop on, Tom drags Annerly up to them, and starts three ringing cheers, "Hip, Hip, Hurrah!" They clasp Annerly by the hand and show their gratitude, shouting as the act drop descends.

ACT II.

SCENE. *The grounds and garden attached to Mrs. Lorrington's Villa.*

[A few days have elapsed.]

[*Enter* TOM *and* ANNERLY.]

Love interest.

Tom and Annerly come on. The audience learns that Annerly is the accepted suitor of Hester. Tom "chaffs"

him about his sham cynicism. Annerly almost doubts his good fortune, it has come to him so suddenly. Tom says that "this modesty is another name for mistrust," and that his "old wound still rankles." Annerly begs him to keep his engagement secret, as he is sensitive to the remarks of Mrs. Witherby and the Major. Mrs. Lorrington has promised to say nothing of it.

Love interest of the other pair of lovers.

Tom complains that Annerly's proposal to Hester has placed him (Tom) in a fix, and makes his silence to Lucy seem "doubly queer." He received yesterday a threatening letter from his uncle, and found him peremptory. He thinks, moreover, that if he declines the marriage, his uncle will cut off his allowance. "In that case," says Annerly, "remember, Tom, we have but one purse."

Preparation for important equivoke scene.

Tom then tells Annerly that he shall propose to Lucy, and make her refuse him. The fault will then be hers, and he will thus escape the penalty.

Lucy comes on at back [*Enter* LUCY], and Annerly says, as he makes his exit, "Well, I leave you to your tactics." [*Exit* ANNERLY.]

Preparation of equivoke scene continued.

Lucy comes down the stage in soliloquy. She complains of her mother's persecution of her, and thinks that if Tom propose to her, and she refuse him, her mother would make her (Lucy's) life wretched, and perhaps even turn her out of doors. She hopes he may not propose at all. She then catches sight of Tom, and sees that he does not avoid her as usual.

The idea suddenly occurs to her that if she could disgust him, so as to keep him from proposing, or make him draw back, if he did propose, she would at once obey her mother, and escape from him as a husband. She determines to try it.

Clever and amusing equivoke scene of about two and a half pages.

Then follows an admirable comedy scene (extending, in the printed book, to about two and a half pages), the result of which is that she has drawn a proposal from him, and bound him to wait for her decision. Lucy exits. [*Exit* LUCY.]

Entrance of character holding the "mystery." The evil influence, or "villain," of the play.

Tom walks up and down excitedly, as Fox Bromley comes on. [*Enter* BROMLEY.] He asks whether Mrs. Lorrington lives at the house, and whether she has visitors. Tom, in a state of agitation, points to the door, and exits brusquely—[*Exit* TOM]—showing that he has an antipathy to Fox Bromley. A little incident is introduced to account for this.

Bromley, in a soliloquy, puts the audience into possession of the fact that he has come to blackmail Mrs. Lorrington, and with some effective sophistry he tries to justify his doing so. He then goes off into the house. [*Exit* BROMLEY.]

The Major, Mrs. Witherby, Camilla, and Effie come on. [*Enter* MAJOR, MRS. WITHERBY, CAMILLA, *and* EFFIE.] Mrs. Witherby has wormed out that Hester and Annerly are engaged to each other; or at least strongly suspects it. The party shows its anger at the discovery. Effie being the only one who is not irritated, as she avows, *aside,* that she loves someone else.

Motive of tenth character.

Interests of opposing characters frustrated.

Mrs. Lorrington, Annerly, Tom, Hester, and Lucy enter. [*Enter* MRS. LORRINGTON, ANNERLY, TOM, HESTER, *and* LUCY.] Mrs. Witherby's party observes the familiarity between Mrs. Lorrington and Annerly. Mrs. Witherby tries to draw Mrs. Lorrington out, in which, owing to her simple vanity, she is successful.

Hester and Lucy chide their mother, and Annerly is angry at the innuendoes, so much so that he frankly confesses before them all that he is Hester's accepted suitor. They all congratulate Hester and Annerly. Mrs. Witherby and the Major go up the stage talking. Lucy now approaches Tom, who pretends not to see her, and goes off, giving his arm to Effie Witherby. [*Exeunt* TOM *and* EFFIE.] Lucy remarks, *aside*, "Excellent, he avoids me!" following it with a threat; and she then goes away with Camilla Price. [*Exeunt* LUCY *and* CAMILLA.]

Mrs. Lorrington now approaches Hester and Annerly. Finding him a little cold, she takes an independent tone, and lets him know that Hester had previously had two offers of marriage, and that one, repeated—from Paul Gresham—Hester had not yet replied to. "Have I not?" says Hester, *aside*.

The mystery re-appearing. Sympathetic character "his friend," keeping an eye on mystery.

Hester and Annerly are both pained at Mrs. Lorrington's talk, and go up and sit on a garden seat. A servant enters and announces to Mrs. Lorrington, "Mr. Fox Bromley!" She is much agitated, and about to give the servant an excuse that she is engaged, when Bromley enters and greets her with much suavity. [*Enter* BROMLEY.]

Annerly observing Mrs. Lorrington's agitation, comes to the front. Mrs. Lorrington softens her tones to Bromley. [*Enter* TOM *and* CAMILLA.] Tom Sutherland, who has noticed what is going forward, having just strolled on with Camilla Price, exclaims, *aside*, "What is this mystery?" Hester and Camilla go off with Annerly. [*Exeunt* HESTER, CAMILLA, *and* ANNERLY.] Mrs. Witherby now comes down the stage, having recognized Bromley. She had met him at Spa the previous summer, when they were both visiting Mrs. Lorrington.

Mystery pretty clearly shown to audience. Evil influence getting ahead.

Bromley then lets Mrs. Witherby know that he was about to tell Mrs. Lorrington a strange story of an old acquaintance of hers. It was connected with a piece of good fortune that happened to a pretty girl who lived many years since in North Wales. [*Enter* CAMILLA.] Camilla Price, who has just entered, asks who she was. Bromley states that she was the niece of an innkeeper, at whose house he first met Mrs. Lorrington during a tour. "I'm sure," he says to her (Mrs. Lorrington), "you remember Betsey Parlett. Well, I've lately discovered that Betsey Parlett, the innkeeper's niece, married a man of large fortune, which she now enjoys. She is a widow, you must know, Mrs. Lorrington, and moves, I'm told, in very good society." Mrs. Lorrington breaks in and begs him to consider himself at home, and to go to the hotel and have his luggage sent in. She then goes off with him in conversation. [*Exeunt* MRS. LORRINGTON *and* BROMLEY.] "How's this?" mutters Tom, *aside*, "I thought they were quarrelling."

Mrs. Witherby and the Major come forward and remark on Mrs. Lorrington's confusion over the Parlett story, and they arrange to tease her mildly about it, in revenge for her patronizing airs.

Conflict of opposing character with a sympathetic one. Sympathetic character still watching mystery.

Mrs. Lorrington re-enters [*Enter* MRS. LORRINGTON], and they commence, eventually working her into a state of excitement. She turns round, and in a passionate speech condemns them for their toadying and meanness. Having relieved herself by this burst of indignation, she suggests, as the young people are anxious for croquet, that the others shall join them as lookers on. [*Exeunt* MRS. LORRINGTON, MRS. WITHERBY, MAJOR, *and* CAMILLA.] They all leave the stage except Tom, who expresses his firm belief that Bromley has some strange power over Mrs. Lorrington, and that Betsey Parlett is mixed up with her antecedents. He then goes off. [*Exit* TOM.]

Hero given some threads of mystery.

Hester and Annerly come on. [*Enter* HESTER AND ANNERLY.] A scene follows (of about three pages), very pretty and sympathetic in treatment, which shows that Annerly's first disappointment has left him still a little suspicious. He alludes to Paul Gresham's offer, which Mrs. Lorrington had told him of. He learns from Hester that Bromley was an old friend of her father's: (he died when she was a child). That his presence always causes her mother annoyance, she thinks in money matters, as Bromley, she believes, has the management of her (Mrs. Lorrington's) property.

Sympathetic and interesting love scene; also developing character.

Annerly speaks of the anxiety that money causes, and thinks that if two people love each other, one of them should be poor, in order to prove the attachment. During this scene Annerly, in a morbid, over-sensitive way, complains, *aside*, of Hester's practical nature and want of sentiment. A speech of Annerly's, saying that if Hester were a poor governess what joy it would be to him to throw his fortune into her lap. Hester replies playfully, but he feels irritated at her lightness. She reminds him that "Trust is the food of love." Their little differences are made up, and the servant comes on to tell Hester that visitors have arrived, and to bring Annerly a packet of letters. Amongst them is one a month old that has followed him from the continent.

Audience surprised and sympathetic over the sudden ruin of hero!

It is from his lawyer to tell him that George Annerly's brother, Captain Annerly (who died a year before him [George] in New Zealand), made an obscure marriage there, and left an infant son, who lays claim to the entailed estates at present held by Annerly. The fact that the two brothers had ceased all correspondence, and the distance of New Zealand from England, account for the delay in the claim being made.

Hero struggling with misfortune. Apparent triumph of opposing characters.

Annerly is staggered, and stands absorbed under this blow, when Tom comes on [*Enter* TOM] with a Hampshire newspaper in his hand. Annerly tells his friend that he has lost the bulk of his fortune. But he says after all it has its bright side, for it will give him the fullest proof of Hester's affection, now

that he is a plain "nobody," with only a few hundreds a year left him by his father. Tom tells him that "Romance is all very well, but that she dreams best on dainty food." He then shows him the Hampshire paper which has got hold of the news, but treats it as mere rumour. Major Price (a Hampshire man) has just received a copy of the same paper, and, as he speaks, the Major comes on, paper in hand, with Mrs. Witherby, Camilla, and Effie. [*Enter* MAJOR, MRS. WITHERBY, CAMILLA, *and* EFFIE.] The Major affects sympathy, and conceals the newspaper.

Mystification of opposing characters watched with interest by audience. Effective and amusing finish to Act.

Annerly keeps his self-possession and gaiety, which makes Mrs. Witherby think the report must be false. She says that even if he were ruined, she and Effie would like him the better for it. Annerly leaves them, with a short but very effective speech, which mystifies the party. [*Exit* ANNERLY.] They turn to Tom, who meets them with some comic evasions in pointed dialogue, as they join in a chorus of inquiry, and the drop comes down smartly and effectively on the second Act.

ACT III.

SCENE—*An interior—same scene as Act* I.

[Two hours have elapsed.]

[*Enter* TOM *and* ANNERLY.]

Important line of plot followed.

Tom learns from Annerly that he has been closeted with his solicitor, who arrived shortly after the letter. It

seems that the rights of the heir-at-law cannot be contested, and the result is that Annerly is a man with six or seven hundred a year only. Tom gives him his sympathy and says that he has just had a letter of gratitude from his old tutor, "Dominie Sampson," for the living, which had been Annerly's gift. In fact the tutor is expected very shortly to thank Annerly in person.

Audience speculating on effect of change of fortune on characters.

Annerly tells him he has spoken to his lawyer about it and he has no doubt that the guardians will grant it. He goes on to say that he shall tell Hester all and give her the power of breaking the engagement, but that he will not wrong her for a moment by thinking she would do such a thing. He now hurries off to meet her at once. [*Exit* ANNERLY.]

Amusing soliloquy. Equivoke. Sympathy.

Tom then has a soliloquy. He thinks women who do not care for wealth and position are "a sort of human aloe and blossom once in a century." Wonders whether any man ever had such a charmer as his own, who plainly tells him she marries him for the chance of a title, and speculates on its present owner's death with the greatest coolness. He tries to think what he shall do to induce her to refuse him. At this juncture Lucy enters. [*Enter* LUCY.] She asks him what he knows about the strange report about Annerly, which she has heard from Major Price and seen in the paper. Tom remarks *aside* that this sounding him looks bad for Annerly. He makes an accusation against Hester to the effect that she has been guilty of mercenary conduct. Lucy indignantly denies this. Tom demands why she (Lucy)

was so eager to hear of Annerly's affairs. Because, she answers, Annerly is dear to her for Hester's sake, and she wishes to show him that adversity cannot lessen her regard for him. She further says that she would not marry Tom if he were the only man alive.

Interests of the other pair of lovers.

Tom then asks her how she could have agreed to take him for the reversion of a title, and calculated his value by the chances of his uncle's life. Lucy explains that her mother threatened her with fearful penalties if she refused him. So she (Lucy) tried to make him refuse her —in fact, to disgust him. She did not foresee, she says, that instead of recoiling from her like a man of spirit, he would persist in following her for her fortune. Tom then explains that his uncle had set his heart upon his (Tom's) marriage with Lucy, and that he tried hard to disgust her. "Your scheme succeeded," she exclaims. "For the matter of that," retorts Tom, "so did yours."

Clearing up of important equivoke scene of page 168, and amusing scene between the second pair of lovers.

She learns that he thoroughly despised her, and that, except as a point of honour, he would not have married her if she had been the only woman alive. "So you withdraw your suit?" she demands. "You have already rejected it," replies Tom. "And you're not angry?" says Lucy. "Eternally grateful!" is his answer. They shake hands on it and appear delighted at being good friends. Lucy then begs Tom will break the news of their being unsuited to each other, to her mother, but not to-day, as she is out of spirits on account of Bromley's visit.

Second pair of lovers plotting to help the hero and heroine.

Lucy reminds him that he is to say that the union would have been

wretched, especially to himself. Tom says, "It was you who broke off the match." "For which you said you were eternally grateful," replies Lucy. "It was a piece of ill-breeding," confesses Tom. She then tells him that he must help her, for she has a little scheme of her own. She then observes from the window that her mother and Bromley are approaching, and says, "Let's avoid them." "We will," responds Tom, "and discuss your little scheme." "Don't break our matter to my mother to-day," repeats Lucy. "No, I won't," says Tom. Then *aside*—"and perhaps not at all. Shylock in petticoats did I call her? She's an angel in muslin!" They go off together. [*Exeunt* TOM *and* LUCY.]

Mystery re-appearing.

Mrs. Lorrington enters with Bromley. [*Enter* MRS. LORRINGTON *and* BROMLEY.] She begs him to leave the house and torture her no more. He reminds her that she would regret it, as he knows a secret on the preservation of which her peace depends. She tells him that his boasted secret, as he well knows, is but his invented slander. She goes on to say that she has paid him his own price, and that he promised no further extortion. "But," he remarks, "I must live." She is in sore distress about it, when Hester comes on, who asks what it all means. [*Enter* HESTER.]

Avowal of mystery, but audience still in doubt as to how sympathetic characters are to be released from pressure.

Mrs. Lorrington then tells Hester that she (Mrs. Lorrington) was not born in—as she calls it—an "elevated position." Her father was a hair-dresser. She was left an orphan

early, and her uncle Robert, an innkeeper in Wales, took charge of her. He was well to do, and sent her to school till she was seventeen. When she came back to live at the inn, one of the tourists, the son of a rich and proud man, offered to make her his wife, but made her vow secrecy for fear of his father's anger. They went to Scotland, where they were married in private by an English clergyman, a friend of Hester's father. Bromley, whom she says feigned to be his friend, was the witness.

Avowal of mystery continued with conflict.

Bromley interrupts her and declares the so-called marriage was a farce. "If there was no marriage," inquires Hester, "how came my mother to inherit her fortune?" "Because," replies Bromley, "your father left it to her in her maiden name."

Mrs. Lorrington tells Hester that her father was so jealous of his secret, and so fearful lest the marriage should be disclosed, that he concealed it even from his lawyer. Further, that they were in France when he (Hester's father) was seized by his last illness. His father suddenly died, leaving him his fortune, which afterwards, still under her maiden name, Mrs. Lorrington came into possession of. The news of her husband's father's death never reached her husband. He died himself before it arrived. "But," says Hester, "even if my father died with his marriage still unacknowledged, what of the clergyman who married you?" "He was sought for and advertised for in vain," answers her mother, "and the only proof of it is held by this man, who denies the marriage altogether, that he may still extort money."

Preparation for serious equivoke scene.

Hester with contempt and indignation orders Bromley to leave the room, which he does. [*Exit* BROMLEY.] She then begs her mother to lay the matter before Annerly, who will cope with Bromley. "What," she replies, "trust such a secret to him—be suspected of dishonour? It would kill me, Hester! Besides, his first act would be to break off the match, for he would not marry you with a taint on your birth." "How could I marry him with honour if I concealed it?" asks Hester.

Trouble of sympathetic characters watched by audience, and important detail for equivoke scene coming.

Mrs. Lorrington then earnestly and warmly begs her not to breathe the matter to Annerly, as they will, she thinks, be shamed for ever. After great urging Hester solemnly promises it, till such time as her mother releases her. Mrs. Lorrington also desires her to say nothing to Lucy.

Tom's voice is now heard outside, and Mrs. Lorrington goes off supported by Hester. [*Exeunt* MRS. LORRINGTON *and* HESTER.]

Tom and Annerly now come on by the window. [*Enter* TOM *and* ANNERLY.]

Annerly has missed Hester as she returned by the road instead of the beach. Tom is urging Annerly to see Hester and get the disclosure of his lost fortune over. As they are talking, Hester enters and anxiously soliloquizes. [*Enter* HESTER.] She shows how difficult it is to marry Annerly with the possibility of the truth coming out. She feels it would be base, and cannot consent to it. Tom goes off, leaving Annerly alone with Hester. [*Exit* TOM.]

Strong and sympathetic acting scene of equivoke.

Now follows an admirable scene (about three and a half pages) of serious interest, in which Annerly tells Hester of the loss of his fortune. She is overcome, and though full of sympathy for his loss, feels herself compelled to draw back—her solemn promise to her mother making her conduct appear in a very mysterious light to Annerly.

Strong scene finishing act with fine effect.

The act concludes with Annerly telling Hester that though he does not think her heartless, he cannot but believe that her love for him was a worldly one, and that she acted in a way compelled only by prudence and self-interest.

As he bids her "Good morning" Hester falls overcome by emotion, and the act drop comes down. [*Exit* ANNERLY.]

ACT IV.

SCENE.—*Another apartment at Mrs. Lorrington's.*

[Time almost continuous. Evening of the same day.]

MRS. WITHERBY DISCOVERED.

Opposing character re-appearing and changing tactics.

Mrs. Witherby is discovered in soliloquy. She has been talking to Mrs. Lorrington, and feels convinced that she is in some way mixed up with the story of Betsey Parlett. She believes too that Hester's mother has forced her to give up Annerly, but Mrs. Witherby has heard from the Major that Annerly has still six or

seven hundred a year, which she would be only too willing should fall to the lot of her own daughter Effie.

Preparation for equivoke scene.

Effie enters [*Enter* EFFIE] and Mrs. Witherby hints that she (Effie) must pay Annerly some attention, as he is not to marry Hester; urges her to throw off her shyness and reticence before him.

Annerly comes on to tell Mrs. Witherby that he is about to leave the house. [*Enter* ANNERLY.] She tells him that she believes her daughter really prefers people for their misfortunes, and hurries off on the pretence of getting a photograph, that Annerly may keep her in remembrance, giving a very strong hint to her daughter *aside* as to her behaviour. [*Exit* MRS. WITHERBY.]

Another amusing equivoke scene and "situation."

A funny scene follows, in which Effie's fear that Annerly is proposing to her, agitates her so much as to amuse and mystify him. Mrs. Witherby re-enters by the door [*Enter* MRS. WITHERBY] and the Major and Camilla by the window [*Enter* MAJOR AND CAMILLA] just in time to catch a word or two which can be construed into a declaration by the two latter. Effie totters in her agitation, and Annerly puts his arm round her waist.

In reply to a speech of Effie's, Annerly states that he never intended to be more to her than a friend, and seals the statement by kissing her hand. The Major and Camilla by pantomime express a lively horror and retire. [*Exeunt* MAJOR *and* CAMILLA.] Mrs. Witherby also disappears [*Exit* MRS. WITHERBY] with a gesture of annoyance, having heard the dialogue

clearly. Annerly conducts Effie off. [*Exit* EFFIE.] He thinks her the most eccentric young lady he has seen for a long time. He goes on to say that he fears he has wronged Hester, and that there may be some hidden motive. He sees Mrs. Lorrington at the door, and is assured that a word from her would solve everything. [*Enter* MRS. LORRINGTON.]

Slight equivoke.

Annerly asks her plainly if there be any reason for her daughter refusing him besides his changed prospects—any mystery in fact. The word "mystery" alarms Mrs. Lorrington, and she fears her secret may be discovered.

She tells him Hester broke off the match because it was no longer prudent.

Annerly reminds her that he only shares the fate of her daughter's former suitors, and that one of them—the rich Mr. Paul Gresham—was a better match, and as his proposals have just been renewed, he may be accepted now. Mrs. Lorrington says *aside* that it might be safer for Annerly to think so. She is in a state of agitation, and leaves him with this impression. [*Exit* MRS. LORRINGTON.]

Equivoke or mystification of characters.

Hester comes on [*Enter* HESTER] to speak to Annerly once more, not to explain, as she says, but fearing that "his hard thoughts will embitter him as much as they wound her," and to hint to him that she is a victim and not a criminal.

This scene (about two pages) a beautiful acting one, concludes with Hester's going off after telling him that the time may come when he will believe that she really loved him for himself. [*Exit* HESTER.]

Mystification of characters.

Annerly is left completely puzzled, her own mother having avowed her worldliness, and yet Hester's tones and manner imply the contrary.

Lucy comes on with Tom [*Enter* LUCY *and* TOM], saying that she can get no explanation from Hester, and demands from Annerly why her sister has left him twice nearly broken-hearted.

Annerly eventually lets her know that Hester has deserted him for his misfortunes. Lucy indignantly denies it.

Mystification continued.

Annerly tells her that her mother has confirmed it, which Lucy says is impossible, and then asks if Hester admitted it. "No, she didn't admit it, but—" says Annerly. "Of course not," answers Lucy, taking him up sharply. She insists that there must have been gross misconduct on Annerly's part for her sister to have given him up. She burst into tears and declares indignantly that Annerly never deserved her. Tom tells him to go and beg Hester's pardon, and chides his suspicious nature.

Apparent triumph again of opposing characters.

Mrs. Witherby, Effie, the Major and Camilla now enter. [*Enter* MRS. WITHERBY, EFFIE, MAJOR *and* CAMILLA.] Mrs. Witherby, with assumed indignation, accuses Annerly of his improprieties with her daughter. Effie tries to explain, but is hushed down by her mother. The Major bears witness that he saw Effie in Annerly's arms. Lucy, *aside*, exclaims: "Here's a light on his conduct to Hester!" Effie again attempts an explanation, but is instantly silenced. The Major and Camilla take their

leave after tendering Lucy mock sympathy on account of Hester. Mrs. Witherby hurries Effie off angrily. [*Exeunt* MAJOR, CAMILLA, MRS. WITHERBY, *and* EFFIE.]

Complete mystification of hero.

Tom and Lucy turn to Annerly for an explanation. Annerly says the world is topsy-turvy and he thinks he must have lost his reason. His betrothed gives him up and yet expects him to trust her, because she is going to marry someone else. Her mother all but admits this, and tells him he is discarded for his losses. When he speaks to the sister, she reproaches him and bursts into tears—and to finish up, an angry lady comes in and abuses him because he showed common humanity to her daughter!

He rushes off, angry with Tom and everybody else. [*Exit* ANNERLY.]

Sympathetic character still with his eye on mystery.

Tom says there must be some mistake about his conduct to Effie, and that the poor girl would have explained something if her mother had let her. Further, that he is confident there is a mystery, and that Bromley is at the bottom of it.

Indication to audience how mystery will be cleared.

Lucy explains that her mother will never allow a question to be asked about him. She remembers once, when a child, her mother's anger at finding her screened by a bush, listening to their conversation. Tom asks her what she heard. She says she remembers nothing but a name, and that only because she was told never to mention it. The name was George Wintersea. "George Wintersea!" repeats Tom.

"I fancy I know the man. Wintersea concerned in it. Your mother's excitement at the Betsy Parlett story, her politeness to Bromley whom she plainly detests. Depend upon it that Bromley is the cause of the quarrel between Hester and Annerly!"

Clearing up of mystery by sympathetic character, made also the means of getting rid of his own difficulty.

"If you could prove that and foil him, says Lucy, "I would as a reward beg your uncle's pardon for you, when he hears you have given me up."

"Stop," cries Tom; "it was you who gave me up." "It's the same thing," she answers. "No," says Tom. "If I give you up, I incur all the penalties my uncle threatened. If you give me up, I'm blameless and get off." "You tried to repel me," she urges, "that was really giving me up." "If you view it in that light," he replies, "I must propose again."

She warns him that if he does she will accept him.

The second pair of lovers' happiness completed.

It finishes by his formally proposing, in a comic way, being accepted, and Lucy saying that if Hester's happiness be insured, her own will be. They go off to find Annerly, and try to settle the difficulty about her sister. [*Exeunt* TOM *and* LUCY.]

The villain and holder of the mystery enters. Audience now interested in his downfall.

Bromley comes on with a deed which is to secure him 500*l.* a year instead of the 200*l.* he has hitherto received. [*Enter* BROMLEY.]

After a soliloquy, again trying to justify to himself his extortion, Mrs. Lorrington and Hester enter. [*Enter* MRS. LORRINGTON *and* HESTER.]

Audience watching conflict between the villain and sympathetic characters, but assured that all will end happily for them.

Hester tells Bromley that she does not deny him the money he would wring from them, but she asks one condition, viz.: that as he was the witness of the marriage, he will give her mother the written proof of it. "What," murmurs Bromley *aside*, "part with my power over her, that's all my capital in life?" He turns to Hester and assures her there was no marriage. Hester in a strong and feeling speech begs him to relent. "Suppose that I could prove it even," he says; "your mother has already paid me large sums because I denied it; I should be within range of the Criminal Court." Mrs. Lorrington begs Hester to accede to anything that will purchase his absence.

Sympathetic characters still sorely tried, but audience convinced that all will be well, though doubtful of means employed. Sense of rising excitement.

Annerly now enters with Tom and Lucy. [*Enter* ANNERLY, TOM *and* LUCY.] He has come to say "Good-bye." The carriage is at the door. Mrs. Lorrington in much distress, and, glancing with pity at her daughter, gives him her hand. He then bids farewell to Hester and goes out. [*Exit* ANNERLY.] Tom fires up and says it is wrong he should go under a fatal mistake, believing Hester false and unfeeling. He asserts that they part because there is some hidden motive, and he believes it is connected with Bromley.

Affecting avowal of the truth by sympathetic character, and interest of the audience in the way avowal is received by hero.

Mrs. Lorrington, alarmed, begs Hester to deny this. Hester tries to control herself, and mutters something. Tom, from the window, sees Annerly about to step into the carriage.

Mrs. Lorrington, with much feeling, cries "Hester, my own child, don't look in that way!" She asks Tom to call Annerly back, which he does. [*Enter* ANNERLY]. She then discloses to Annerly the truth, that she has been a coward and betrayed her daughter, that she is a woman of low origin, and though lawfully married is unable to prove it. That Hester refused a marriage that might have disgraced him (Annerly), that she could not tell her motive, as she wished to spare her mother, finally, that Annerly may give her up if he likes, but that he shall at least respect her.

Hero now in conflict with the villain.

Annerly asks for forgiveness from Hester, and Mrs. Lorrington asserting that she was truly wedded, points to Bromley as the witness, but says that for his own purpose he denies it. She calls Annerly's attention to the deed on the table, by which Bromley would extort more money. Bromley denies the marriage. Annerly asks for the deed, glances over it and tears it to pieces, saying that as Bromley cannot give Mrs. Lorrington any value for her money, she declines to be robbed of it. "But I still hold her secret," exclaims Bromley triumphantly. "Which," retorts Annerly, "is worthless to you the moment you disclose it."

Villain trying a last chance.

"Suppose," says Bromley, "I could produce the proof, the certificate of marriage?" Mrs. Lorrington asserts this to be "impossible, as it was advertised for in vain." "By whom?" demands Annerly. "By Bromley, as my agent," she replies. "Oh, then," says Annerly, "he has received the certificate and concealed the fact."

Audience watching the approaching full disclosure of the secret to the other characters.

Hester breaks in with "No matter, give him his own terms, let him produce the certificate signed by Mr. Wintersea!" "*Mr. Wintersea!* who once lived in Scotland?" exclaims Annerly. "Yes," answers Mrs. Lorrington, "the clergyman who married us." "Tom," says Annerly [*aside, with meaning*]. "Not yet, old fellow, give him line," replies Tom.

Audience amused by the baiting or humiliating of the villain.

Annerly avers that such a document would be very valuable, and after some higgling and Bromley's saying that he would consider whether he would take £10,000 for it, Annerly turns round on him with the declaration that to-day or to-morrow *Wintersea himself* will hand the certificate to Mrs. Lorrington.

Secret out to characters as well as audience.

Tom then goes on to explain that his old tutor, Dominie Sampson, to whom Annerly gave the living, is himself Wintersea, that he is on his way to the house and is expected in a few hours.

Laugh against the villain, and defeat of the evil influence.

Bromley is requested to retire, and Tom gives him his cane, as he thinks it "safer in his own hands." [*Exit* BROMLEY.] Bromley goes off protesting he is "misunderstood to the last, and a victim of circumstances."

Satisfaction and happiness of all the sympathetic characters.

Tom then tells them that Lucy and he are engaged to be married and will go to church with Annerly and Hester.

Mrs. Lorrington declares herself very happy, blesses

her children, and determines for the future she will speak "the plain truth in plain words."

Making the best of it by the opposing characters, and a bright finish to the Comedy.

Mrs. Witherby, Effie, the Major, and Camilla now come on. [*Enter* MRS. WITHERBY, EFFIE, MAJOR, *and* CAMILLA.] Mrs. Witherby says that as Annerly seems to be on the winning side, she is too old a stager to be on the losing one. "The way of the world," adds the Major. Effie is delighted at the result, as she can marry the man she loves; and Annerly declares that, though poor otherwise, in possessing Betsey Parlett's daughter, he is still the Favourite of Fortune.

CURTAIN.

CHAPTER VII.

DEDUCTIONS AND GENERAL ADVICE.

A FEW useful conclusions may be arrived at, which although in some cases emphasizing what has gone before, will, it is hoped, have some practical bearing on the art of play-making. A book can no more enable a man to write a play, than to compose a sonata, paint a picture, or carve a statue. Without an ear it is impossible to become a composer or a lyrical poet; or give sympathetic interpretation and expression to the work of others, as singer or actor. It is clear also that without the gift of dramatic sense or instinct, a play worthy of the name cannot be produced. Every play-wright must be to some extent a creator or maker. He is, as before stated, a poet in its original signification, and must therefore primarily be born and not made. Like the verb of our school days he must *be, do* and (generally) *suffer*. But *poéta nascitur non fit* is a partial truism. There is a vast deal of doing as well as being and suffering.

Seeing that the art of the play-wright to be successful is governed by the arbitrary and conventional, more than other forms of literary work, it will be understood that a disregard of these qualities is fraught with considerable danger. Conventionality is sorely abused,

but it is one of the spokes in the strong wheel of Experience, and cannot be safely ignored and dispensed with. It is regrettable that the eternal rage for novelty should often encourage work that has no jot of stamina or durability ; and much more so, that artistic treatment should be wasted on it. But

> "All with one consent praise new-born gawds,
> Though they are made and moulded of things past,
> And give to dust that is a little gilt
> More laud than gilt o'er dusted."

That the production of a good play is no easy task I think will be conceded. Nor can a temporarily successful one be thrown off in the airy manner that many people assume. That the belief is so commonly entertained by those with the gift of literary expression, seems to be due partly to their never having been at the pains to ascertain whether they are endowed with the necessary "sense," and in a measure to technical requirements being underrated. Sympathy with dramatic elements, or response to the effects they are capable of producing, in the theatre, is inherent in all except the most torpid natures. The power of creating or adapting them is given to few—"our perception far outruns our talent." When for the first time a young play-goer sees acted some short dramatic gem, he feels that it would require no great labour to go home and produce such another. It is difficult on the instant to recognize the value and rarity of the art displayed. That of the theatre, too, is many sided, and gratifies a variety of tastes in the same being. In youth there is in all healthy natures, spite of vanities and weaknesses, a host of kindly and generous aspirations that leads to a desire to excel before one's

fellows. To many who contemplate a work of art which appeals strongly to them, an inward feeling, which may be expressed in the words "Why didn't *I* do that?" will arise. The ease, fitness, and perfect naturalness of the composition tend to illusiveness. "In every work of genius," to quote once more the author of "Society and Solitude," "we recognize our own rejected thoughts; they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty."

The simplicity of a theme often gives it the appearance of being easy in execution. But the simplicity of a subject is one thing, its treatment another. What can be simpler than Lord Tennyson's "Dora" (taken from Miss Mitford), or the second "branch" of "The Holly Tree," or "Rab and his Friends," or Browning's "Night and Morning" (in sixteen lines)? and yet to how few are such accomplishments possible. And here a parallel may be found with dramatic work which will in a measure give a clue to the true "dramatic sense." Wordiness and prolixity are inimical to it, and consequently fatal. The maximum of feeling or fancy, and the minimum of words, must be a rule for plays that are to be acted. One touch of the brush rightly given will convey the highest and fullest sense, with the aid of the actor's art. That final touch may have cost a thousand trials, but it is the right one, and no other will do as well.

"Do managers want good plays?" and "Is it any use offering them?" The queries are natural enough, and are mentally entertained if not spoken, by many who have been disappointed in their efforts. Every aspirant believes that his work, if not of the highest class, is equal to much that he sees actually produced, and which,

to all appearances, is popular and attractive. But alas! appearances are deceptive ; a play that has run for perhaps hundreds of nights, and which is evidently filling the manager's treasury, there cannot be much doubt about. But let it be repeated, there are hosts of skilful plays produced, that cost the author, manager and actors time, trouble and expense, and which may enjoy some sort of a "run," but in no wise can be regarded as successful from the business standpoint. Some plays are good enough to draw for a time, and pay their way, but show themselves deficient in real permanence. The circumstances that induce a manager to present any particular play are not made generally public. He is his own master, and his enterprise can take any form for which he is prepared to pay. Anticipation of an active nature is necessary to enable him to carry on management with fair chances of success. This being so, it will be readily understood how unforeseen accidents and events may completely upset the most carefully prepared plans.

> "The best laid schemes o' mice and men
> Gang aft a-gley,"

but mice and men must go on scheming for their bread and cheese, blunder as they may.

It may be a matter for regret, but it is perfectly true, that

> "Some sparkling, showy thing, got up in haste,
> Brilliant and light, will catch the passing taste."

Can there be any wonder that theatrical enterprise is so risky and uncertain, or that "it partakes," as a clever

manager has expressed it, "greatly of gambling." Sir Henry Taylor, in his Autobiography, speaks of the life of a political adventurer, without private fortune, as "hard, anxious and unquiet," and of "more excitement than any except those of an actor or a highwayman!" His friend Macready's perplexities were pretty clear to him, and it is certain that the modern manager is in a position of no less responsibility. But to return to the question under consideration. It may safely be said, and it should be some consolation to those authors who, in addition to natural gifts, have two qualities equally important, energy and patience, that the supply of plays good enough to put before an audience is always unequal to the demand. Of a sort there are dramas enough and to spare, ready at a moment's notice; but as the mainstay of a theatre always has been, and is likely to continue to be, derived from novelty, it is not possible for sound, not to say high class dramatic work to be produced as quickly as it is required. The manager is perfectly cognizant of this, and seeing that the chances are slight of an inexperienced writer supplying him with what he requires, it can scarcely be wondered at that he does not bestow the attention on untried work that it often deserves. A glance is enough sometimes to decide that what is submitted is perfectly useless to him. Half a dozen speeches in the very first scene of the play may enable him to judge whether it be worth his while to give any serious attention to what is before him. A description of the first scene (for young dramatic authors, like beginners in other branches of art, bestow great pains on the adventitious and subsidiary), or the very title of the play may be

enough to indicate to the manager that it will not serve his purpose. And here is a great point: however good your play may be, of what avail is it if the purpose of the management is not in some way served, or you are unable to meet its requirements? It must not be assumed that even a fine play will make its mark anywhere. Numberless instances could be given of fairly good plays losing their chance by being accepted at the wrong theatre. It is true that occasionally a play will stand the test of a considerable lapse of time, and achieve an after triumph elsewhere. As in literature so with the drama. It would be as absurd to suppose that a piece which might be acceptable, at say the Adelphi, would suit the Haymarket; as that a paper meeting the requirements of *The Nineteenth Century* would be of service to *Punch*. And yet managers have continually poured in upon them pieces that are utterly inappropriate to the theatre or style of company associated with it. The size of a house has an immense importance in determining the prosperity of many plays. It will not be difficult to understand, that if the piece be such as derives its charm from delicacy of detail, finesse, or a certain idyllic tone, much of its aroma unavoidably evaporates in a large theatre. There is a very distinct limit to the powers of the most gifted actor. We do not use the *cothurnus* and the *persona*. I remember some years since, hearing the great Italian actor, Signior Salvini, whose physical powers histrionically are quite exceptional, and who is accustomed to enormous theatres, complain of the size of Covent Garden Theatre, where he was then acting. Conceive how in a large area, where an actor of finish and refine-

ment is deficient in voice power, and lacking physique, the most delightful episodes must be lost or robbed of their due effect. As Charles Mathews in a speech made at Philadelphia remarked of an immense building, "Insurmountable difficulties arise where a speaking trumpet is required for the actor and a telescope for the spectator."

Good plays are always wanted, and the anxiety to get hold of them is very great, the multiplicity of theatres increasing the demand. But is it to be wondered at, that a busy and harassed manager is not in a position to give serious thought to the enormous mass of written or printed matter that is being perpetually brought under his notice?

If I submit a paper or a story to an editor or a publisher, I do not expect either of them, when he rejects it, to give me the reason for his refusal. Should he do so, it is an extended courtesy or kindness, which I value as such. And yet there are untried authors who are quite aggrieved because a manager does not sit down and write an exhaustive estimate of the piece. It is a marvel that managers are as patient as they are, when one thinks of the absolute rubbish that is constantly asking their suffrages. A little more frankness and moral courage at times, would really be doing a service to the inexperienced, for unhappily there are those who fritter away their lives in hopeless endeavours to meet the requirements of the stage. The late Mr. Dutton Cook, in the work already mentioned, "On the Stage," has collected some amusing stories of managers, such as Garrick, Rich, etc., in their dealings with would-be dramatists. An account of Garrick's artifices, which were ably seconded by his brother George, is very entertaining. There was some

reason for Garrick's fears. Popularity was life to him, and those were the days of lampoons, pasquinades and other scathing forms of satire.

If after what has been said there can be any doubt that managers are in want of good plays, it is surely proved by the irrepressible revival of the old favourites, which follows some new play that has failed to attract. The "School for Scandal," "The Rivals," "She Stoops to Conquer," "The Road to Ruin," "The Lady of Lyons," "Money," etc., etc.; how regular and reliable is their resuscitation. And notwithstanding the difficulties in casting and mounting these old plays, they generally prove attractive, if the spirit of them is not sacrificed. By the mysterious law of our land, too, there is nothing to pay to their authors or their descendants. If but one tithe of the capital since realized, had fallen to the lot of the authors when they were alive, what rejoicing hearts there would have been for a time, for certainly, though their reputations were not fleeting, with some of them, the money would have been. The stage not only has its dangers as well as delights for actors, but for authors also. Did not Tobin spend his energies in the night, writing play after play which he could not get accepted; dying at the early age of thirty-four, but a few weeks before his one really successful drama, "The Honeymoon," was produced? The struggles of Gerald Griffin, the author of "The Collegians" (known to the stage by Boucicault's "Colleen Bawn") were pathetic in their persistency. His beautiful play of "Gisippus" was first acted by Macready, long after the author's death, which took place when he was but thirty-seven.

How little does the amateur writer really know of

the true struggles of the dramatist. There are hundreds of people to whom money is no object, and who would feel amply repaid by their efforts being put upon the stage, without any remuneration beyond the popularity that may accrue from them. Some of them have undoubted gifts, and with study and application might produce work worthy of living. But these requisites are quite disregarded, and as the authors are not dependent on such efforts as they do make, they can only be looked upon in the light of pleasant distractions. Neglect, discouragement, favouritism, broken faith, and the thousand disagreeables that fall to the lot of every real worker, are unknown to them. And are not these the very things that go to put the true artiste on his mettle and strike from him what is of value? Going "through the mill" is not a pleasant operation, but it is the only way to get associated with the grist. Sir Walter Scott declared that he was unequal to the operation theatrically, but we are disposed in his case to murmur "'Tis better as it is." When the powers get dispersed and run into a variety of channels, the current flows but weakly. If the effort be regarded as an amusement, well and good, there is always a crowd whose idle members will throw up their caps and shout at anything. The average man is not a Goethe or a Napoleon, but the world is full of those who can do a little of everything fairly well. But what is the value of a Crichton? He wrote comedies and played in them, but made a greater hit in giving a celebrated fencing-master his quietus in a duel; but we call to mind, alas! that he got his own by being assassinated at twenty-three in the public streets!

It is related of the great Bernini that he produced

"an opera, wherein he painted the scenes, cut the statues invented the engines, composed the music, writ the comedy and built the theatre." He must have forgotten to play the leading part! His eminence as sculptor, architect and painter we may not question, but it would be surprising to learn that the music and the comedy ranked equal in merit, with competent and unbiassed judges of these arts. This was an amusement of the great palace builder, whose industry and energy were remarkable. It was Bernini who would not interrupt his work for any strangers who came to his studio, "whether princes or cardinals; they stepped softly in and sat down to look at him in silence." I think I have artist friends who regret that the great Neapolitan's example is not easily followed now. Amateur play-making is not likely, however, to stand in the way of the professional dramatist. Sir John Vanbrugh, the architect, attained to celebrity; but Blenheim has proved more durable than "The Provoked Wife" and "The Relapse." Sergeant Talfourd, the author of "Ion," too, did not depend upon his exertions as a dramatist. As the legal profession has supplied a large contingent of play-wrights, we must allow an intellectual affinity in the bar and the stage.

Though we may agree with what Charles Reade asserted in respect to the vast gulf that exists between the creator and the adapter, the art of the latter must not be underrated. Translation is not adaptation. Indeed, to successfully adapt, constantly asks for original invention. Twenty authors might make a play from the French tale "Le Retour de Melun," but it asked an experienced dramatist like Tom Taylor

(another valued friend) to construct a drama from it, as successful as "The Ticket-of-Leave Man." He very justly claimed some of the honours due to one who creates, as the characters, sentiments and action were anglicized. In more modern times, Sardou has necessitated great skill and much originality in making his work successful in England. But the practice of adaptation, even without any thought of getting a play accepted, is calculated to be of the greatest use to the beginner. He must select with caution, and beware of various incongruities that are apt to be somewhat baffling, and which only experience can supply the solution of. When nearly thirty years ago Charles Mathews played in Paris, Blanchard Jerrold's farce, "Cool as a Cucumber," under the title of "L'Anglais Timide," he made, as he candidly confessed, a curious mistake. Patient as French audiences are over some forms of the drama as to wordiness or prolixity, they demand in others a terseness or condensation greater than that which is looked for in England. Mathews (a skilled adapter and author himself) had played "Cool as a Cucumber" successfully hundreds of times in his own country, and believed that what Englishmen would sit out patiently, would be as acceptable to the French people. But he found that towards the end of the farce the audience was getting very palpably bored, and only the most wholesale cutting afterwards, saved the play from failure. In his own words, "The necessity for explanation at the end of every piece, according to our English ideas of dramatic propriety, the seeing everybody married and settled, and all the obscure points of the plot mathematically cleared up before

dropping the curtain, is not only not required by the French public, but is deemed tiresome. They like to drop the curtain when the fun is over, and guess the rest." . . .

"L'Anglais Timide" became a great success in Paris, and old play-goers will remember that he performed the curious feat four years afterwards of playing it in English at the Olympic, and in French at the St. James's for Ravel's benefit on the same night. But—to tender another warning—it does not follow that, although there may be nothing ethically to stand in the way, a play which is successful in France will be so in England. Mention has been made of the absurdities some writers are guilty of in the selection of subjects for adaptation to the purposes of the theatre. Dickens's description of the ridiculous profanities displayed in a version of "Paradise Lost" presented in Paris, will be remembered by those familiar with the "Life" of the great novelist, by Forster. It is not so generally known that Milton himself had—despite the Eikonoclastes—a bias for the drama. He might reasonably have headed the list of great names given in the first part of this work, when his allusion to plays is remembered in his address to Charles Deodati, in which it is supposed that Romeo and Hamlet are pointed at. That "Comus" was written to be acted by the children of the Earl of Bridgewater at Ludlow Castle, and has been produced at Drury Lane Theatre in our own day, and that—not to speak of "Samson Agonistes"—his immortal epic had originally the form of a drama, to be called "The Fall of Man." More curious still is what Aubrey relates of "his familiar learned acquaintance;"

how "Jo Dryden, Esq., Poet Laureate, who very much admired him, went to him to have leave *to put his Paradise Lost into a drama in rhyme*," and how "Mr. Milton received him civilly, and told him he would give him leave *to tag his verses*."

Are there any perfect plays? or such as can be safely taken for models in the study of the craft? Perhaps the nearest approach to such will be discovered in one-act or two-act pieces. It would be pleasant, if space permitted, to draw attention to some of the gems of the French theatre, which deserve the closest study. Many of them are as good as can be, containing not a vowel too much or too little, so great are the pains bestowed upon their finish. Most of them have been very happily put into English form by gifted and clever authors. The names of Scribe, Emile Augier, Octave Feuillet, Jules Sandeau, Madame de Girardin, Théodore de Banville, François Coppée, Meilhac and Halévy, are those of a few of the best known who have contributed to this class of work. It may be remarked that the finesse of the French language, and the colour belonging to the modes and graces of the French people, lend themselves to a certain delicacy and refinement not always attainable in the English versions, even when the adapter is gifted with the poetic temperament. But on the other hand it is quite possible that a little play may, in the process of anglicizing, become more truthful than the original from which it is taken. It may lose in aroma, but gain in the higher quality of sympathy or humanity; the change of action from one country to another strengthening too on occasion the main "motif."

In England we look for a story in a play that shall

start with interest, increasing in it as it progresses, and be sustained steadily to the end. The skill that can be shown by a master-hand in dealing with a simple "motif" is wonderful. It is to the essence that attention should be given, the essence of action and incident stripped of all undue elaboration. What is to be *seen* must be closely held to. The pleasures of the audience must be experienced, or the emotions stirred through the agency of sight as well as sound. Writing a play for the blind would be an infinitely easier thing to do than to supply one which should appeal to the completest faculties, even though the assembly might not be an intellectual one. A deaf person could get no enjoyment from the music of "L'Enfant Prodigue," but would hardly fail to be touched by the eloquence of the movement. Sermons, diatribes, social theories and political opinions are regarded as impertinences in the theatre, unless they are distinctly the outcome of the characterization and necessary for the development of the plot. Movement must always be kept well in sight—

> "But above all, give them enough of action ;
> He who gives most, will give most satisfaction."

It is of value to read a play aloud, or try the effect of parts of it, or scenes, on auditors of various tastes and temperaments. Did not Molière read to his housekeeper? But it must be admitted that a too sanguine acceptance of the opinion expressed by friends is distinctly unsafe. A truer test possibly would be to

read the play to your enemies. I am assuming, as Sir Oliver Surface says, that you have "merit enough to deserve them." Self-estimate is one of the rarest of qualities; very specially is it, with an author as to his dramatic attempts. Better, however, an exaggerated belief in the value of your work, than a feeble one. If it touch and interest you, it will probably have a like effect upon your hearers. But seeing that the art of the actor can make very vapid productions bear the semblance of merit, it will be well to guard against the danger of trusting overmuch to the interpretation of your work. It should be able to shine through average treatment.

An important principle in connection with the popularity of a play, is that it makes appeal to a *mixed* audience. This will account for the value of such a feature as *the adjustment of caste*, as I have called it: the conflict of course being guided and governed by treatment sympathetic and human. The rule laid down by Jeffrey, in speaking of the author of "Sardanapalus," is applicable to all play-writing.

"The style of the drama," he says, "should be an accompaniment to action, and should be calculated to excite the emotions, and keep alive the attention of gazing multitudes. If an author does not bear this continually in his mind, and does not write in the ideal presence of an eager and diversified assemblage, he may be a poet perhaps, but assuredly he will never be a dramatist."

The different units which make up an audience must

in fact be remembered. As Goethe's manager says in the Prelude—

> "Would you please many, you must give good measure;
> Then each finds something in't to yield him pleasure;
> The more you give, the greater sure your chance is
> To please, by varying scenes, such various fancies."[1]

This is the secret of very beautiful plays sometimes, enjoying but a limited existence. They appeal to but a few phases, and the texture of them is too thin for the masses. No particular part of the theatre is implied by this. Stalls are included as well as gallery. Indeed some of the humbler and poorer frequenters are as sensitive to the delicate touches of pathos and poetry, and have as keen and true an appreciation of the beauties of a play as the wealthiest and most cultured members of society.

I fear it must be confessed that always leaving out of consideration the "legitimate" drama, and apart from the influence which time gives in favour of great names, the finest plays do not draw the most money; and that artistic completeness, whether in the making or the rendering, must be in some degree—like what so many writers have declared of virtue—its own reward. Mr. Ruskin, in speaking of "Don Quixote" and the judgment of it by the multitude, has some remarks that are pregnant with truth, and are likewise of extreme value in getting at what is distinctive in the greatness and popularity of a work. A few lines (from "Modern

[1] Anster's trans.

Painters") may serve to whet the appetite of those for whom the subject has an interest: "The lowest mind would find in 'Don Quixote' perpetual and brutal amusement in the misfortunes of the knight, and perpetual pleasure in sympathy with the squire. A mind of average feeling would perceive the satirical meaning and force of the book, would appreciate its wit, its elegance, and its truth. But only elevated and peculiar minds discover, in addition to all this, the full moral beauty of the love and truth which are the constant associates of all that is even most weak and erring in the character of its hero, and pass over the rude adventure and scurrile jest in haste—perhaps in pain, to penetrate beneath the rusty corslet, and catch from the wandering glance the evidence and expression of fortitude, self-devotion and universal love."

What follows on the reputation of Shakespeare, is of like value and beauty. The extract will indicate how various are the points of view from which the merits of a great work can be appraised, and the same conclusions may be drawn, as is further shown, with regard to the acting drama.

It is averred by both novelist and play-wright that the customs of modern life have robbed them of much incident and motive. This is not to be denied. In "The Road to Ruin," for example, we have the clerks and employés living in the same house with the merchant, the romantic episodes and colour derived from the old coaching days, sheriffs' officers, and arrest for debt, duelling, etc., etc. These all supply motive and the power to bring about collision. Dramatists of

to-day nevertheless have a compensation in the effect obtained from careful rehearsal, and an attention to minutiæ and detail, which it would be idle to deny have as great an attraction for many play-goers as the more vital qualities of the drama.

Still a series of tableaux or living pictures are to the true play-goer but a poor substitute for a soundly constructed play that is instinct with gaiety and feeling. The art of the theatre can give a value to the veriest inanities, and by skill make the two bushels of chaff look as if they consisted of nothing but wheat. A handsome, well-mannered, well-dressed man of good carriage, fluent and self-possessed, can speak "an infinite deal of nothing," and it shall have the seeming of very clever talk. With a lovely and gifted woman, the success of the dramatist is more than half assured by her co-operation :

> "For where is any author in the world
> Teaches such beauty as a woman's eye?"

There are conditions of a more or less accidental nature, that sometimes determine the extent and permanence of a play's popularity. They are of importance, particularly to the provincial manager or director of a touring company. "The Lady of Lyons" is more constantly acted than "The School for Scandal" or "Money." Casting and putting on the stage the former favourite drama, is much less exacting to the resources of the theatre, that is, the treasury, than either of the other plays. A manager looks askance when he sees that there are twenty or thirty "speaking

parts" in a play, and that an author has been prodigal in the way of palaces, throne-rooms, gardens, fêtes, processions, drums, trumpets, alarums, and the like. Spanish castles are more easily reared than even canvas ones. And here attention may be drawn to one rule that has few exeeptions. It accentuates what has been remarked before on the wedding the actor's talents to the material. *All good and popular plays have good "parts" in them.* In the best there are really no ineffective characters. Within a certain range, actors can be found who will always be equal to what an author can supply them with. Strangely enough, too, the very poorest play, which results in the direst failure, will sometimes yield an artiste the opportunity for which he has long been sighing.

About the merits of many plays that have become classics, there has always been the greatest difference of opinion. We know that Pepys lost his admiration for "Othello." After reading "The Adventures of Five Hours" he thought Shakespeare's tragedy "a mean thing." "The Merry Wives of Windsor" did not "please him at all in no part of it," and "The Midsummer Night's Dream" was "the most insipid ridiculous play that ever I saw in my life." "Macbeth" impressed him at first as being only "a pretty good play," but after frequent visits to see it acted, he esteemed it more highly: *chacun à son goût.* It is quite possible to enjoy "The Adventures of Five Hours" (adapted by Sir George Tuke from Calderon), and not to be deficient in appreciation of Shakespeare. "The Adventures of Five Hours" is a skilful and sprightly play of intrigue, something in

the style of the once popular "Wonder." And from our knowledge of Mr. Pepys we are not surprised at the encomiums he bestowed on it. The same differences of opinion will exist as to the merit of modern plays that have been successful. About the workmanship of a play when it is printed and accessible to all, there can in the minds of experts be little doubt, I think.

From a list of longer plays that have met the requirements of more modern times, and which can be offered as illustrations of good and attractive work, it is not easy to make a selection. The names of many of the most popular and meritorious have been repeated frequently in the course of this work. The longevity of a good play, or the length of time it will remain capable of being revived, cannot with certainty be predicted. Past memories of critics and old play-goers, the very gradual and subtle change in social tone, and the skill brought to bear on a play by its acting and presentment may each and all have a share in determining this. There are many phases of excellence also. A piece may have the greatest possible merit in one respect, and be entirely wanting in it in another. T. W. Robertson, for instance, would be unsafe to take as a model. His influence was thoroughly healthy, but what was best in him he could not transmit. Nor would it be wise to point to one whom it was generally asserted belonged to the school of Robertson—James Albery. To select that favourite play, "Two Roses," as an example of good construction would be to mislead. It is to its delightful dialogue and characterization, as we have shown, that it owes a popularity extending over more than twenty years. One of the soundest and best plays of recent times I have

before referred to, "New Men and Old Acres," due to the collaboration of Messrs. Tom Taylor and A. W. Dubourg. It was first produced in London at the Haymarket Theatre in 1869, but its success was greater, on its revivals some years later. It is a thoroughly delightful play, and, efficiently interpreted, like all the highest class of work, strikes a note of deeper significance than that usually associated with mere amusement.

"Masks and Faces" is another admirable specimen, well balanced, witty, humorous, and charged with the best and truest feeling. Its authors (Charles Reade and Tom Taylor) were real masters of their craft.

A few names of successful play-wrights of the past have been already mentioned in the first chapter, but the beginner cannot do better than study the efforts of all the better class of skilled and experienced dramatists. Much of their best work is quite accessible. Many of the best shorter plays are revived from time to time. They should be seen in the theatre and closely studied in book form afterwards. Every student of literature has his own method, but I think there is one matter in perusing a play that is of importance. It should be read for the first time at one sitting, for, as Poe says, "If it be too long for this, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression; for, if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and everything like totality is at once destroyed."

Collaboration has been spoken of as desirable, but that it presents difficulties to the English mind is evident. It would seem that, like other partnerships, its success depends as much on mutual respect and

sympathy of temper as on any close intellectual affinity. It is important that in the conjunction, there should be no great disparity in the views held on the *morale* of the subject treated. "One man does the plot and the other the dialogue" is a vulgar estimate of the art of collaboration, but a little reflection will show that the interdependence of the two, renders the task in the hands of even the most experienced, one of no slight magnitude.

The naming of a play is generally made far too much of. It is well to have a good title, but it has never made a play intrinsically better. A volume could be written on the history and vagaries of play-naming. The first title of "The Lady of Lyons, or Love and Pride," was "The Adventurer," and though it was not approved of, the success of the play would certainly not have been affected by it. Sir Joshua Reynolds was most anxious that his friend Goldsmith's popular play should be called "The Belle's Stratagem," which seems very apt, but it came out as "She Stoops to Conquer, or The Mistakes of a Night," Mrs. Cowley, as we know, taking the first part of the title for a play she produced later. The titles of plays, it may be remarked, in which the word "Love" finds a place, are legion. "Love's Labour's Lost," "The Love Chase," "Love for Love," "All for Love," "Love's Sacrifice," "Love Laughs at Locksmiths," "Love in a Village," "Love in Wrinkles," "Love and Honour," "The Love Knot," etc., etc., etc. Love also has its Frailties, Vows, Alarms, Quarrels, Trials, Dreams, and so on. "Woman" runs "Love" very close, as is only natural. In East-End, transpontine and minor country theatres, titles have

always had a certain value, particularly in the grim, mysterious and terrible. It is rare now to see such titles as "The Temple of Death," "The Evil Eye," "The Death Fetch," "The Skeleton Witness," "The Iron Shroud," and "Michael Erle, the Maniac Lover," even on play-bills over the water. When David Copperfield went to a dinner-party at the Waterbrooks' there was an expressed enthusiasm for Blood. "Other things," said the host, with his wine-glass at his eye, "are all very well in their way, but give me Blood." "We see Blood in a nose," rejoined Hamlet's aunt, "and we know it." At one time we used to see it in the play-bill. "Raymond and Agnes, or The Bleeding Nun of Lindenbourg," "Oscar, the Half-Blood," and "The Vampire Bride" were well-known titles. Mr. Crummles asserted that "The Blood Drinker" would die with the unrivalled Miss Petowker of Drury Lane. The drama sanguinary was already doomed. Burlesque and ridicule have effectually obliterated the influence of the German school, "Monk" Lewis, Mrs. Radcliffe, and their compeers. The sub-titles that were in use are amusing to the present race of play-goers. "As you Like it, or Love in a Forest," "Judith of Geneva, or the Felon Countess," "Fazio, or the Italian Wife's Revenge," "Plot and Passion, or the Female Spy, the Dupe and the Minister." There were endless devices to make the entertainment attractive through the medium of the play-bill. The summary, or synopsis, was also a taking feature. I have only space for the following, a copy in part of a Hamlet bill common in the north of England twenty years since—and may be now.

ACT 1.

ELSINORE—PLATFORM BEFORE THE CASTLE.

THE MIDNIGHT WATCH.

Sudden Appearance of the Ghost of Hamlet's Father!

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One word on criticism, and its treatment of a perfectly unknown writer. If a play be well made, and competently, if not efficiently acted, there is little to fear from professional judgment. Criticism in the main, is now discriminating, fair and honest. It is only right to remember what an exceptionally wearisome duty it is apt at times to become, and that a long experience unavoidably produces a more or less jaded feeling with regard to what is but mediocre. Cliques and rings are not known as a power in England. Friendly help will be of advantage to a writer for the theatre, as it will to any worker in art. Introductions too are of value to the unrecognized in getting the ear of the manager; but it is after all on real merit that the beginner must depend. Failure may be his lot, but if he can see the errors of his work, and, what is better, the way to amend them, it will be of greater use than any feeble toleration or half success. What the future of the stage may be, it is not easy to say, but there is enough that is sound in tone and healthy in feeling, to render our amusement in the theatre, rational, invigorating, and artistic. Mr. Besant, in writing on the Art of Fiction, advises the young novelist "to pour into his work all that there is of nobility, sympathy and enthusiasm in himself"—the words may be borrowed to convey the same truth to the dramatic writer. The age, which though gradually stretching beyond them in point of time, is still happily under the direct influence of what is noblest in Carlyle, Thackeray, Tennyson, Dickens, the Brownings, George Eliot, Ruskin and others, and which is quick to respond to the touch of living authors who faithfully carry on the traditions and beliefs in respect to right thinking,

may be trusted to protect itself from such minor evils as from time to time are sure to arise in connection with all entertainments in the dramatic form. Let us be heedful of the wisdom conveyed in the words of the great satirist who gave us "Vanity Fair," and who, in speaking of "Mr. Punch's business," says, "May he laugh honestly, hit no foul blow, and tell the truth when at his very broadest grin—never forgetting that if Fun is good, Truth is still better, and Love best of all."

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